

The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same:
The Maintenance of White Privilege and Power Amid Demographic Change in a Suburban
School District

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ABSTRACT

The More Things Change, the More they Stay the Same: The Maintenance of White Privilege and Power Amid Demographic Change in A Suburban School District

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My dissertation examines racial power dynamics and whiteness in a previously all-white suburban school district that is now home to a very racially, ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse population. Specifically, I explore how white parents make sense of and respond to changing racial demographics in their community and the extent to which whites maintain privilege and power as they comprise a declining proportion of the community population overall. In light of the current political and social context in the U.S that has accompanied demographic change, there is a great need to critically examine the racial ideologies of whites as they relate ongoing structures of inequality, particularly in suburban areas that are previous centers of white isolation and modern epicenters of demographic change.

Using a multi-modal case study methodology, I found that in this particular suburban context, where residents of color possessed similar or greater levels of income and education than white residents, and students of color performed at similar levels as white students in the public schools, dominant ideologies that associated whiteness with superiority and goodness persisted and led some white parents to flee the changing community and schools. Moreover, despite the increasingly small proportion of whites in the community and schools, white parents and residents were able to leverage their racial privilege and status in ways that reasserted and maintained unequal racial power relations in Parkwood through school district policies and practices. This research highlights the often invisible and under-examined ways in which white

interests are continuously centered and served in ways that reproduce structures of racism in the “post-racial” era. Overall, the findings from this study contradict dominant colorblind narratives and point to the many ways in which whiteness operates, often in surreptitious ways, to maintain the racial status quo and exert social control over people of color even in contexts in which logic might imply that the power and privilege associated with whiteness would be threatened.

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Dedication

For my husband Slav, who has always believed in me.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In August 2014, following the death of 18-year old Michael Brown at the hands of Darren Wilson, a white police officer, a spotlight was shone on the suburban community of Ferguson, Missouri. As the long-simmering pain, frustration, and anger that culminated amongst the residents of Ferguson in response to Brown's murder was on display, the case came to be a symbol of the modern contextual reality of race and racism in 21st century suburban communities, and in the United States as a whole. In a number of ways, Ferguson can be considered a microcosm of what is happening across the country as rapid demographic changes in the population overall and shifts in residential patterns across urban/suburban lines are transforming common notions of race and place in America. Indeed, the predominantly black community of Ferguson became a prominent example of how common meanings of "suburbia" as exclusive, privileged white enclaves are being challenged in the modern context.

Much of the coverage following Michael Brown's death focused on the on-going racial tensions in Ferguson in light of a dramatic transformation in its racial makeup over recent decades, which parallel similar shifts in suburban communities across the country (Kneebone, 2014; Saunders, 2014; Nicks, 2014). Today, Ferguson looks much different now than it did 25 years ago, when its residents were predominantly white and middle-class- in 1970, for instance, white residents of Ferguson comprised 99 percent of the total population compared with just over 25 percent in 2014, when Michael Brown was killed (Kneebone, 2014; U.S. Census, 1970). On the other hand, black residents make up about 67 percent of the population, while the local power

structure- including the police force, city council, and the school board- remains nearly all-white (Kneebone, 2014; Smith, 2014). Furthermore, while Ferguson was solidly middle-class in the 1970s, today, one out of four residents is poor.

Ferguson is by no means an anomaly- it is, in fact, just one of many suburban communities across the United States that have undergone rapid racial and economic changes in recent years after decades of systematic exclusion of people of color (Rothstein, 2017; Kneebone, 2014). Suburbs— once synonymous with images of tranquility, economic prosperity, high-quality schools and concentrated white privilege— are now home to the majority of the country’s black and Latinx residents, more than half of foreign-born Americans, and about one-third of those living in poverty (Frey, Berube, Singer, & Wilson, 2009; Frey, 2015; Gallagher, 2014).

Like in Ferguson, as residents of color have increasingly opted to move to suburbs in search of the same idyllic lifestyles that attracted whites who fled urban areas in the mid-20th century, they have often been met with fear and backlash from white residents and power structures, resulting in white flight, declining home values, weakened tax bases and disinvestment in social services like public schools— that have derailed the potential promises of the suburban dream (Nicks, 2014; Frey, 2011; 2015). Thus, the story of Ferguson highlights the need for a closer examination of how whites in suburban neighborhoods and schools that have historically existed as largely white enclaves are responding as they unexpectedly find themselves on the front lines of racial integration.

At the same time, Brown’s murder and the events following led to increased visibility of the Black Lives Matter movement, white has raised awareness of the ongoing racial injustice in this country and disrupting comfortable, false narratives of a “colorblind,” “post-racial” America

that have dominated the racial common-sense of the post-civil rights era (Taylor, 2016; Gilman, 2018; Underhill, 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Indeed in the current sociopolitical context, the national consciousness is increasingly being faced with reminders of the need to reckon with the history and ongoing reality of white supremacy, racial inequity and injustice in a nation that has built its modern identity around myths of equality, meritocracy, and freedom of opportunity for all.

Despite this, however, too many whites continue to cling to colorblind and self-serving narratives like “All Lives Matter” that re-center and protect whiteness, minimize the reality of racism as a systemic feature of American society, and silence voices of color seeking to address it (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018, Smith, 2017; Orbe, 2015). In fact, after the murder of Michael Brown, a Pew Research study found that 80 percent of black respondents, compared with only 37 percent of whites, felt that the shooting “raised important issues about race.” A larger percentage of white respondents, 47 percent, replied that in relation to the case, “race is getting more attention than it deserves.” (Pew Research Center, 2014, p.1)

In this context of demographic change, suburban transformation, and the increasing visibility of movements for racial justice that aim to illuminate and dismantle white supremacy and structural racism, feelings of fear and resentment on the part of many white Americans are increasingly coming to the surface (Anderson, 2016; DiAngelo, 2018; Spanierman & Cabrera, 2014; Craig & Richeson, 2014a). Social science research has demonstrated that threats to white privilege and comfort due to declines in white majority status and efforts towards racial progress are associated with more negative white racial attitudes (Craig & Richeson, 2014a, 2014b; Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000; Bobo, 1988; Fossett & Kiecolt, 1989, Giles & Evans, 1986; Quillian, 1995; Anderson, 2016; Feldman & Huddy, 2005).

Researchers have also found that residents in suburban communities are more likely overall to exhibit negative racial attitudes and racial stress and are less likely to support policies aimed at addressing racial inequality than those living in cities (Carter and Corra, 2012; Myerson, 2017). Moreover, in many changing suburbs, power structures have not evolved to reflect the demographic change of the community, as many of those in leadership roles in city and county governments, schools, and police departments remain mostly white, limiting the political power of residents of color to advocate for local policies that would serve their own best interests (Kneebone, 2014; Lewis-McCoy, 2017). Thus, I argue that in light of the current political and social context in the U.S that has accompanied demographic change, there is a great need to critically examine the racial ideologies of whites as they relate ongoing racial power dynamics and structures of inequality, particularly in suburban areas that are previous centers of white isolation and modern epicenters of demographic change.

In the field of education, issues of race, place and education have often been discussed in terms of inequities between well-resourced, affluent, and mostly white suburban schools and their poorer, underfunded, predominantly black and/or Latinx urban counterparts (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Posey-Maddox, 2016). However, this outdated urban-suburban dichotomy overlooks the reality of education in suburbs today, which are now often more racially, ethnically, socioeconomically, and linguistically diverse than their urban neighbors (Lewis-McCoy, 2017; Posey-Maddox, 2016). Moreover, I argue that public schools, which have historically been sites of much racial tension and white backlash in response to changing demographics and school desegregation efforts (Wells & Crain, 1999; Formisano, 1991), are the suburban institutions where families of different racial/ethnic backgrounds are most likely to interact amidst demographic shifts.

Thus, suburban schools are important and understudied sites where we can come to understand the interactions between the ideologies and actions of white parents and institutional policies and practices in suburban communities as they respond to demographic change. In particular, there is a need to examine how racial power dynamics play out in the current demographic and sociopolitical context. A growing body of research has begun to document how patterns of racial segregation between schools (Diem, Cleary, & Frankenberg, 2014; Wells et.al., 2014; Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012), and stratification within schools (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Drake, 2017) are often reproduced within racially diverse suburbs. However, more work is needed, and there is a lack of research on suburban schools that critically examines the actions and meaning making of white parents within suburban communities in which they are becoming a minority.

Other recent literature in the field of education has explored the identities, school choice decisions, and privilege of white parents in demographically changing schools in *urban* neighborhoods (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013; Reay, Crozier, & James, 2011; Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg & Cucchiara, 2014). This research has illuminated the processes by which white, middle class families work to secure advantages for their children in racially diverse schools. My work adds to this literature by applying a critical lens to explore the interrelations of the ideological and institutional dimensions of racism as they relate to power, privilege, and whiteness in suburban schools.

Moreover, this literature on racially diverse urban schools as well as the research mentioned above that explores diverse schools in suburban communities, has largely focused on contexts in which there are notable socioeconomic differences across racial groups, so that white parents are disproportionately advantaged both because of their racial privilege and their

economic status (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013; Reay et.al, 2011; Posey-Maddox, 2014). This study, on the other hand, focuses on white parents' meaning making about race and public schools within the context of a rapidly changing suburb in which they are becoming the racial "minority" amid neighbors of color who have higher incomes and education levels than they do. I explore what white privilege looks like in this context and how it is asserted when the economic and demographic advantages that often overlap with whiteness do not apply.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

My research informs this important, but incomplete body of work on race, privilege, and power in racially diverse schools through an examination of the meaning making and actions of white parents and dynamics of race and power the context of one demographically changing suburban community, which I call "Parkwood". The suburb of Parkwood is a particularly interesting context in which to conduct this research because as discussed above, in contrast to the school sites that have been examined most often in literature on diverse schools, income and education levels among residents in Parkwood are very similar across racial lines, and in fact, are actually lower for whites than other racial/ethnic groups. Furthermore, measures of academic achievement of public school students are similar across racial lines. In this context, it was possible to more directly examine the extent to which whiteness and racism continue to operate to secure privileges and power for white students and families independent of academic and socioeconomic factors. In light of colorblind narratives that emphasize the need to move beyond race-consciousness in education policy and practice, this work offers an important contribution to our understanding of the continuing significance of race and racism in diverse schools.

To thoughtfully and critically explore the ideological and institutional mechanisms through which racial inequity is produced and reproduced across contexts, I drew on three interrelated theoretical perspectives: critical whiteness studies, critical race theory, and the sociology of race and racism. Guided by this rich scholarship on whiteness and racism, I designed a multi-modal qualitative case study to address the following research questions:

- 1) How do white, middle-class suburban parents of school-aged children make sense of and respond to increasing racial and ethnic diversity in a previously white suburban community and school district?
- 2) To what extent and in what ways are racial stratification, inequality, and unequal power dynamics maintained in these schools as the white population decreases?

Suburbs as Sites of Racial Exclusion

As suburban communities began to proliferate following WWII, they were, through explicit and implicit practices of racial discrimination, largely exclusive to white residents (Rothstein, 2017; Wiese, 2005). Whites who benefited from low-interest home loans moved out of cities in droves and were able to quickly build real estate wealth, while black families who aimed to access the lifestyle and opportunities available in the suburbs were often met with restrictive covenants, redlining, threats, and violence (Wiese, 2005). White residents and real estate agents resisted the entry of black residents in overt and covert ways for decades, aided by the establishment of local governments that created zoning laws, building codes, and health and safety laws that allowed for “a potential for exclusion which exceeds that usually available to the resident of the central city.” (Danielson, 1976, p.27) Thus, built off of racism and systematic discrimination, suburbia and whiteness became interconnected in 20th century idealized images

of the “American dream”- characterized by white prosperity, single-family homeownership; lush, green landscapes; and well-funded, high-quality public schools.

While today, the Fair Housing Act restricts overt housing discrimination and suburbs are becoming more and more racially diverse, vestiges of past policies and modern forms of white racism have, in many cases, maintained and recreated systems of exclusion for people of color in the suburbs. In some cases, white residents fled quickly as black residents moved in, expressing fears of crime, disorder, loss of property values, and declining school quality (Weise, 2004; Powell, 2002). While white suburban neighborhoods tend to attract economic development that boosts property values and tax revenue, black suburbs in particular are often plagued by poor reputations driven by white racism, and thus, are often seen as less desirable (Cashin, 2007; Wells et.al, 2014). As a result, over time, suburbs with large black populations experience less economic growth and suffer declining property values, making it harder for residents to build wealth (Cashin, 2007).

Black suburbs, on average, have higher property taxes than do white suburbs with higher levels of real estate wealth, but are still less economically stable and have less access to social services than those that are predominantly white (Cashin, 2007). In public schools, a declining economic base means a loss in funding and resources for education in suburban communities that are home to increasing numbers of people of color and/or low income residents (Orfield, 2011). Even in schools and districts that remain racially diverse and well-funded, black and Latinx students often have less access than to material, political, and social educational resources, and lag behind their white peers on measures of academic achievement (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

Changing Suburb, Changing Schools

Parkwood is an ideal and unique microcosm in which to study racially changing suburban school districts. It is a small, quiet residential community located on the edge of the city and suburban boundaries, making it what is commonly called an “inner-ring” suburb. The community and schools have experienced rapid demographic change over the past twenty years. The residential population, which was nearly entirely white in the 1990s, is now only 35 percent white, non-Hispanic (ACS, 2017), as new residents of color have moved in and a large number of white residents have fled to more racially isolated white communities. Approximately 20 percent of Parkwood’s current residents are black, 15 percent are Asian, and 30 percent are Latinx (ACS, 2017). Parkwood is extremely ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse as well. More than 30 percent of the local population are foreign-born, the majority of whom are of Central American, South American, and South Asian descent (ACS, 2017). There is a particularly substantial population of Muslim residents in the community. In light of growing diversity and its proximity to the nearby city, Parkwood is often referred to by long-time and former white residents as an “urban” suburb.

Parkwood is considered to be a middle-class community based on nation-wide averages, and is located in a region with very high costs of living relative to rest of the country. In contrast to commonly cited statistics on the decline of suburbs and increasing rates of poverty (Kneebone & Berube, 2013), median income levels and home values have risen in recent years; the current median income is approximately \$90,000, and median home prices are about \$375,000. The median income for white households in Parkwood (~\$85,000) falls below that of black (~\$120,000), Asian (~\$130,000), and Latinx (~\$100,000) households (American Community Survey, 2017a; 2017b).

Importantly, while the income levels and home values in Parkwood appear very high in the national context and there are low rates of poverty and unemployment in the community, the area is less affluent overall than most of its surrounding county. Interview participants in my study discussed feeling economically stressed given the continuously rising cost of living, and used terms ranging from “working class” to “lower middle class” to “middle class” when describing themselves and other Parkwood residents.

The Parkwood public school system serves just under 10,000 students from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. Recent demographic changes in the community are even more pronounced in the public schools, due to the fact that the white population is older on average than the non-white population and that some (mainly white) families choose to send their children to private schools. The public school population in Parkwood has changed from over 90 percent white in 1993 to 72 percent white in 1999 and only 22 percent white in 2017 (NCES, 2017). In my analysis, I focus specifically on secondary schools in Parkwood, which have all seen substantial demographic change in recent years, but to different extents. I describe these schools in more depth in Chapter Three.

Project Significance and Overview of Dissertation Chapters

Looking only at socioeconomic and academic data across racial groups in Parkwood, one might assume that the community is somewhat of a multicultural utopia that has somehow managed to overcome the deep structures of racism and inequality that plague our society. Many of my interviewees spoke about the community and schools just that way, in fact. The parents and community members I spoke with repeatedly described how residents and students of many different racial and ethnic backgrounds lived, worked, and learned harmoniously alongside one another without incident. For instance, Mr. Gallo, the principal of one middle school in the

district, which I call Riverside, spoke of the interracial friendships and colorblind attitudes of students in his school, “You see kids of all different nationalities and ethnicities hanging out. It doesn’t matter to them. You know the kids see beyond color, ethnicity, race believe it or not.” Jennifer, a white parent interviewee, told me that her neighborhood is so diverse that she refers to it as “the United Nations” and said that she and her neighbors of all different racial backgrounds had formed a tight-knit, trusting community reminiscent of “Leave it to Beaver” that was hard to find these days. A common theme across nearly every interview- including parents of different racial backgrounds, school leaders, and community members- was that in Parkwood, race and racial inequality were simply not a consideration in peoples’ daily lives.

Upon digging deeper, however, I quickly understood that while Parkwood did not exhibit the same levels of visible stratification and inequality that are typical of many racially diverse suburban spaces, race was very much embedded in the every-day interactions and meaning making of those who lived there. Moreover, my research illuminated how the ideologies and actions of white residents as they intersected with structures of racial power and privilege, led to sometimes covert, but meaningful forms of exclusion and marginalization of residents and students of color.

Thus, this project provides an important contribution to literature on suburban demographic change, racial attitudes, and power dynamics in diverse schools by examining how white privilege and power is maintained in this racially diverse suburb, even as the common patterns of the intersections between race, income, and educational outcomes were reversed. I learned that in this context, where residents of color possessed similar or greater levels of income and education than white residents, and students of color performed at similar levels as white students in the public schools, common ideologies that associate whiteness with superiority and

goodness remained. Moreover, despite the increasingly small proportion of whites in the community and schools, white parents and residents were able to leverage their racial privilege and status in ways that reasserted and maintained unequal racial power relations in Parkwood in a number of ways. This research highlights the often invisible and under-examined ways in which white interests are continuously centered and served in ways that reproduce structures of racism in the “post-racial” era.

In the next chapter, I describe the theoretical framework for this study, which draws on critical whiteness studies, critical race theory, and sociological theory on race and racism to understand how socially constructed racial ideologies interact with and reproduce structural forms of racism across historical, social, economic, and political contexts. I focus most specifically on theories of race, racism and whiteness in the “post-racial” era, which helped me to understand the multi-layered and iterative processes by which white structures of power in Parkwood endured as whites comprised a smaller and smaller proportion of the population in the community.

In Chapter Three, I review relevant empirical research from the field of education that has explored the evolution and endurance of white privilege and power within public schools. I present research on white resistance to school desegregation policies prior to and following *Brown v. Board of Education* and describe why such efforts compromised the potential for meaningful school integration. I also summarize recent research in both urban and suburban contexts that document ongoing racial inequities in racially diverse schools in the era of color-blindness.

In Chapter Four, I present my methodology for this multi-modal qualitative case study, which was aimed at understanding the relationship between the racial ideologies of white parents

in Parkwood and the reproduction of structures of racism and exclusion in the public schools. I describe my research methods, consisting of in-depth interviews, as well as online and in-person observations, which allowed me to examine the connections and contradictions between the how white parents spoke about race and how they behaved. My observations and interviews with parents of color, school and district leaders also helped me to understand how racial power dynamics and dominant racial ideologies in the community continued to privilege whites parents and students.

In Chapters Five through Seven, I present the findings from my research in Parkwood, which illustrate how whiteness operates to maintain the racial status quo even in this context in which logic might imply that the power and privilege associated whiteness would be threatened due to demographic change.

In Chapter Five, I discuss how dominant perceptions of school and neighborhood status and reputation were tied to the racial demographics of those who occupied the space, regardless of objective, tangible characteristics. Furthermore, I describe the common justifications that white parents used to explain their beliefs about reputation status, which often associated racial diversity, and particularly the presence of black and Latinx people, with perceived danger, deficiency, and decline.

In Chapter Six, I explain how the actions of white parents in Parkwood contributed to on-going segregation between schools and exclusion of students and parents of color within schools. Moreover, I demonstrate the color-blind language and ideologies that served to silence the voices of people of color and maintain the status, comfort, and privilege of whites while shielding them from the responsibility of addressing the racism and racial inequality persists in the schools and community.

In Chapter Seven, I detail the institutional practices that were kept place in Parkwood, as those in power, who were predominantly white, continuously prioritized the interests of white parents over those of parents of color. In this way, white parents, who comprised a relatively small proportion of the overall population, wielded the bulk of the political power as a result of their racial status, allowing them to exert considerable influence over the policies and practices that governed Parkwood's public schools.

Finally, in Chapter Eight, I discuss the overarching themes across the three findings chapters, explain the limitations of this study and areas in need of future research, and outline implications from this research for policy and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I describe the theoretical perspectives used to frame my study of the response to demographic change in a previously all-white suburban school district. In light of rapid changes in recent years that have transformed the racial makeup of the nation as a whole, and suburban communities in particular, in addition to the well-documented expressions of anxiety, fear, and resistance among white Americans who feel that their racial privilege is being threatened, I seek to uncover the relationship between the meaning-making and ideologies of white parents in Parkwood and the extent to and mechanisms by which systems of racial inequality, white privilege and power are maintained in this context.

To inform my research, I developed a framework of overlapping and complimentary theoretical perspectives that demonstrate the relationship between the racial structures and ideologies that are embedded in social institutions like public schools. I draw on critical whiteness studies (CWS), critical race theory (CRT), and related sociological theories of race and racism, which guide my understanding that whiteness, race and racism must be directly interrogated, and cannot be studied or dismantled by examining and addressing individual racial attitudes and beliefs in isolation from the social structures, contexts, and collective ideologies that are constructed in society.

Guided by these theoretical perspectives on race, racism, and whiteness, I designed this study with the goal of uncovering the iterative and interconnected relationship between the meaning making, or *ideologies* (cultural explanations, racial frames, attitudes, emotions) and *actions* of whites in Parkwood and the *institutions* (policies, practices) in place in the public

schools as they relate to the current sociopolitical context of race and demographic changes in the community. In other words, I examine the ways in which ideologies and institutions are both embedded in broader social structures of racism and the context of the modern era in which many whites argue that we are “post-racial,” and can serve to reinforce patterns of inequality in Parkwood and its schools.

Figure 1. The Iterative Relationship Between Racial Ideologies, Actions, and Institutions in the Reproduction of Racial Stratification.



In the following section of this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the three theoretical perspectives I draw on to inform this study: sociological theories of race that speak to the interrelatedness of racial structures and ideologies; critical race theory, and critical whiteness studies. I then discuss dominant racial ideologies that serve to justify racial inequality in the “post-racial” era. In the following section, I present theories of white self interest as it relates to ongoing racial stratification in society, as well as white racial fear and racial threat, which are

common responses from whites when their racial power and privilege is challenged. Taken together, these theories guide me in an understanding of how the meaning making of whites in Parkwood is embedded in pervasive racial ideologies and the broader social contexts that preserve white interests and recreate inequality, even in the Parkwood context in which some whites feel that their interests are threatened.

Sociological Theory on the Interrelatedness of Racial Structures and Ideologies

Drawing on sociological theories of race and racism, I approach this project with the understanding that racism is *structural*, rather than simply individualistic in nature. While early work on race and racism in the sociological imagination treated racism as a largely individual rather than a structural problem, more recent scholarship has indeed emphasized the importance of understanding race as created and sustained by the collective social world and context in which individuals are situated (Omi & Winant, 1994, 1994; Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 1999, 2018). Racism can be defined as a multi-level social structure consisting of “a network of relations at social, political, economic, and ideological levels that shapes the life chances of various races.” (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p.1360. Drawing on Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory and the notion of *duality of social structures*, I am interested in the process of how race, racism, and whiteness are constructed, with the view that social actors as both *producers* and *products* of society’s racial structure. In other words, the ideologies of individuals are constructed within social structures that influence their actions and behaviors, which can then recreate, or sometimes interrupt, patterns of social reproduction. As Hughey (2012) argues, “dominant meanings of race organize our social relations and how this social order works to reproduce racist schema and racial inequality through the mundane activities of everyday life.” (p.4)

A related feature of race and racism according to leading sociological theorists of race is that they are fluid and dynamic in nature; in that they can be adapted, transformed, created and destroyed in relation to historical, social, demographic, political, and economic contexts (Omi & Winant, 1994; Bonilla-Silva, 1997). This evolution over time has relied on institutional mechanisms such as laws, policies and practices that create and sustain racial stratification, as well as pervasive racial ideologies that serve to legitimate, obscure, and reproduce it. In the United States, white racial ideologies— common-sense frameworks, ideas, and representations that are constructed through group-based experiences and internalized in the minds of individuals— have adapted in an iterative and cyclical manner to justify an enduring and entrenched hierarchical system of racial stratification and white supremacy (Omi & Winant, 1994; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

This process can be seen in various forms throughout our history: settler colonialism, slavery, Jim Crow segregation, Japanese internment, housing discrimination, educational and health inequality, and mass incarceration, for example, have all relied on structures and ideologies of racism to maintain racial division in essentially every domain of social life. In the study of race and racism, therefore, a key step in the process of critiquing and deconstructing structures of racism and white supremacy is to understand the common sense ideologies that uphold and perpetuate them, as was the goal of my research in Parkwood.

Critical Race Theories of Race and Racism

Building on the prior work of radical feminist and critical legal scholars, critical race theory (CRT) is a diverse interdisciplinary movement that emerged in the mid-1970s in response to a recognition on the part of a group of lawyers that the end of the Civil Rights Era had given way to a backlash against racial progress, resulting in new and more subtle forms of racism that

were stalling and rolling-back progress made by civil rights activists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Taylor, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Prior to the birth of critical legal studies (CLS) and critical race theory, race was largely viewed as biological, and thus was treated in the law as a “simple legal category” (Guinier & Torres, 2002, p.35). A key goal of early CRT scholars, therefore, was to disrupt the treatment of race as *fixed* in the law and to link discussions of race with ideas about *ongoing*, *dynamic*, and *deeply engrained* power relations in society (Guinier & Torres, 2002; Omi & Winant, 1994). As CRT has grown and expanded over recent decades, scholars have proposed various forms of the guiding themes, or tenets, that have grounded the work of critical race theorists across academic disciplines (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Here, I discuss several of these themes from CRT that are most relevant to this study.

Critical race theory, like the sociological theories discussed above, argues that race as a socially constructed category that has no biological or intrinsic meaning. Instead, race and racial categories are human creations that are not fixed or objective, and are the products of ideologies and relations between groups “that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient.” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.7) A related theme is the understanding the racism is ordinary, not aberrational, meaning that racism is so engrained into the structure of society that its nature is almost unrecognizable and rarely questioned by those who benefit from it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor, 2016). Thus, in the “post-racial” era, it is more critical than ever for research to explore deep-seated meaning making and processes by which race and racism are enacted in our every day lives.

Furthermore, Derrick Bell (1992), a key founder of CRT, developed two tenets of critical race theory that further my understanding of how structures of racism and white supremacy are reproduced in places like Parkwood. Bell wrote of the *permanence of racism* in society, which

“ensures that civil rights gains will be temporary and setbacks inevitable” (p.10)—in other words, even as “progress” is made, the racial hierarchy, with whites occupying positions of power and blacks as the designated racial “other”—remains unchanged.

In his related theory of interest convergence, Bell (1980; 1992) argues that civil rights have only been obtained by blacks when “whites perceive that nondiscriminatory treatment...will be a benefit to them.” (Bell, 1992, p.7) Bell (1980) used the concept to argue that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that ordered the end of state-sponsored segregation in schools was achieved only because the interests of blacks converged with those of whites. In other words, desegregation was not implemented as a result of meaningful desire on the part of whites to transform power relations in society. This helps to explain why, following *Brown*, efforts to implement desegregation were often slow, resisted, or nonexistent, and have since been largely abandoned (Horsford, 2019).

Two additional CRT tenets, whiteness as property and the critique of colorblindness, are particularly relevant to my research in Parkwood. I discuss these two concepts in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter. The critique of colorblindness, also called the critique of racial liberalism, is based on a common CRT argument that racism is very much an ongoing feature of society and race-conscious, rather than colorblind efforts are necessary in order to transform structures of inequality. I connect this to Bonilla-Silva’s (2018) theory of colorblind racism below.

Finally, critical race and critical legal studies scholar Cheryl Harris (1993) coined the term *whiteness as property*, to explain how socially constructed notions of racial identity have evolved into racial categorization and the construction of a racial hierarchy in which whites, at the top of the hierarchy, possess actual property as a product of their racial privilege that is

institutionalized into law. In later sections, I connect components of Harris's theory to dominant ideologies of racism and the ongoing maintenance of white supremacy, which are helpful in my understanding of the meaning making and structures of power in Parkwood and its schools.

A Critical Whiteness Studies Approach

Because I focus my attention on examining how white parents in Parkwood construct meaning and behave in ways that enact and reinforce systems of power in their racially changing community, my theoretical approach is grounded in the guiding assumptions and principles of critical whiteness studies. Inspired by the work of critical race theory and originating in the mid-20th century writings of a number of African-American scholars, including James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, and W.E.B Du Bois, CWS aims to problematize the normative nature of hegemonic whiteness and critically illuminate the ways in which whiteness operates, particularly in the current sociopolitical era, in often hidden ways under the guise of racial liberalism and ideologies of colorblindness (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, & Galindo, 2014; Underhill, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997).

Critical whiteness theorists argue that research on race and racism requires an interrogation of whiteness that takes into account the ongoing institutional and ideological forces that have provided systematic unearned privileges and benefits to whites. This work contrasts early "mainstream" scholarship on race dominated primarily by white theorists that often focused on the problem of race as a problem of the racial "other" (Applebaum, 2010; Doane, 2003). Indeed, in academia overall, too little attention is given to the role of whiteness in shaping how we think about the problem of and potential solutions to racial stratification.

As a result, the mechanisms by which whiteness operates as a force of racial domination in society remains under-examined and too often overlooked. As Mills (1997) argues, whiteness

creates an “epistemology of ignorance” (p.18) that is focused on details of race while missing the broader totality of what he calls the *racial contract*. He writes, “The Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance...producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.” (p.18)

Moreover, the notions of the material and psychological wages of whiteness theorized by Du Bois (1935) were essential in the formation of critical whiteness studies as a discipline. Du Bois wrote of the power of internalized racism and the benefits of the public and psychological wages of whiteness that led low-wealth white laborers to cling to their whiteness as a way to distinguish themselves from blacks in a way that still rings true today. He argued that the psychological wage of whiteness was a key factor that prevented the formation of a more meaningful democracy for black and white laborers during the time period following the legal abolishment of slavery, because whites were compensated with a public and psychological wage of whiteness that afforded them “public deference and titles of courtesy” (p.700) and were allowed to access public institutions and privileges that were reserved for whites:

They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent on their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them. White schoolhouses were the best in the community, and conspicuously placed, and they cost anywhere from twice to ten times as much per capita as the colored schools. The newspapers specialized on news that flattered the poor whites and almost utterly ignored the Negro except in crime and ridicule. (p.700-701)

This notion of the wages of whiteness contribute to important modern-day understandings of both material privileges associated with whiteness (e.g. historical wealth accumulation, access to better-resourced schools, and neighborhoods with higher levels of

environmental quality) and psychological benefits (e.g. perceptions of status and reputation, representation in normative/ dominant culture). Thus, a system of inequality that maintains whiteness as superior- through both ideological and institutional mechanisms- to people of color is difficult to dismantle because it whites have a vested interest in keeping racial stratification intact.

Guided by the goals of CWS, I aimed to reveal the often hidden structures that create and recreate white supremacy and white privilege in Parkwood by interrogating the extent to which the actions and ideologies of white parents, in interaction with institutional policies and practices, function to preserve systems of racism and white privilege in schools and community as they serve an increasingly multiracial population. In the next section, I discuss theories on the dominant racial ideologies that are connected to, and serve to protect ongoing privileges and wages of whiteness in the current context in the United States.

Racial Ideologies and the Legitimation of Racial Stratification in the Post Civil-Rights Era

Critical scholars of race have long demonstrated the ways in which racism, racial ideologies, and racial categories shift, morph, and adapt over time in response to cultural, social and historical contexts to ensure the preservation of racial power structures (Omi & Winant, 1994). Following the eradication of Jim Crow era laws, the U.S. mindset surrounding racial categorization began to shift. For much of U.S. history, the dominant racial ideology was one that saw blacks and Native Americans as biologically inferior—subhuman— to justify violence, destruction, theft, and exploitation. In the post-civil rights era, it is no longer morally acceptable in mainstream society to hold feelings of contempt towards others, or to overly discriminate with people based on their race (Omi & Winant, 1994). However, racism continues to exist in

ideological and institutional forms, and whiteness continues to be associated with a wealth of unearned benefits that are not afforded to racial “others.”

In this section, I summarize two key and related characteristics of the dominant racial ideology in the modern era that justifies to the persistence, or permanence, as critical race scholar Derrick Bell (1992) calls it, the permanence of racism in society. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2018) argues, racist ideologies serve to promote a mythology in which whites are viewed as superior to those who have been socially assigned to other racial groups. In turn, these ideologies rationalize and legitimate whiteness, white supremacist structures, and subjugation of the racial “other.” (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Thus, it is critical in the study of race to understand not only the policies that continue to structure disadvantage for people of color, but also the ideologies that support and obscure structures of racism. I first present theories on racial status ideologies, which apply Weber’s (1978) concept of status and the social estimation of honor to an understanding of racial ideologies that associate whiteness with higher levels of social status as a way to legitimate the unequal distribution of resources in society. I then discuss theory that expands this examination of race and status by exploring the moral and cultural explanations for racial inequality that have become dominant in the current era, replacing ideas about the biological superiority of whites. These ideologies proliferate as a way to justify continued racial oppression and white supremacy in the “post-racial” era (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2018), which is characterized by colorblind racism and racial liberalism, the concepts I discuss in the following section. These dominant ideologies have been studied and critiqued extensively by critical race theorists and sociologists as mechanisms for obscuring the reality of ongoing racism in society.

Race, reputation, and status ideologies.

In his three-component theory of stratification, Max Weber (1978), theorizes that power in society can be derived not only from economic and political power, but through status as well. Status, he argues, is derived from a positive or negative evaluation of one's *social estimation of honor*, which is then used to allow for the monopolization of material or social resources in the hands of those who occupy high positions in the status hierarchy (Weber, 1978). The notion of status ideologies has been proposed by Weberian contemporaries as a way to explain how ideology functions as a means to protect the economic and status interests of elites (Collins, 1985; Holme, 2002). Collins (1985; 1994) argues that Weber saw status ideologies as a way to "cloak the economic basis underneath" (p.89) and that dominant groups are able to rationalize their own economic and political power by "claiming that it is different not because of its wealth or power, but because of its greater nobility, its honor, its politeness...whatever the prevailing status ideology happens to be." (Collins, 1985; 1994; p.89) Thus, modern conceptualizations of the "social estimation of honor" can be seen as grounded in myths of meritocracy that are tied to whiteness and white normativity.

Weber's explanation of status is conceptually connected to Harris's notion of the *reputation and status property functions of whiteness*, which is based on the idea that de-association with whiteness is associated with defamation and a loss in reputation and status (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In education, it is easy to see how reputational status of schools, classrooms, and forms of knowledge is derived from the presence of and connections to whiteness and the behaviors or characteristics that signal conformity to whiteness, just as identifying a school or program as non-white can serve to diminish its status (Ladson-

Billings & Tate, 1995). In Chapter 5, I discuss my findings that increasing percentages of students of color in Parkwood schools resulted in their declining status and reputation.

And as Omi and Winant (1986) argue, race-based status ideologies are a powerful tool in the legitimization of the racial social order, as “race becomes ‘common sense’ - a way of comprehending, explaining and acting in the world. Racial beliefs about who and what is deemed to be associated with higher status operate as an ‘amateur biology,’ a way of explaining the variations in ‘human nature.’” (Omi & Winant, 1986, p.62-63) Through this process, differences in economic, social, and political outcomes are attributed to individual characteristics and behaviors rather than structural forces, keeping the structural forces intact and invisible. In this way, privileges associated with whiteness can be viewed not as a result of race but rather to the hard work, moral and cultural superiority and “goodness” of successful white people, and the plight of people of color can be attributed to lack of effort and moral deficiency. Below, I discuss connected theories on the modern-day dominant ideologies of moral and cultural superiority of whites that serve to legitimate and perpetuate racial stratification.

Moral and cultural explanations for racial inequality.

In dominant western culture today, whiteness exists as the neutral and ideal “norm” and is central to (white) conceptualizations of what it means to be considered “American.” Even in our increasingly globalized, multicultural society, the dominance of whiteness means that white culture, values, theologies are imposed onto those of other racial and ethnic backgrounds and serve as the standard upon which others are judged. These norms include values of capitalism, individualism, Christianity, meritocracy, white standards of beauty, and English monolingualism (Crouch, 2013; Sue, 2004). As Crenshaw (1988) argues “the white norm...has not disappeared; it has only been submerged in popular consciousness. It continues in an unspoken form as a

statement of the positive social norm, legitimating the continuing domination of those who do not meet it.” (p.1379) As a result, whites have the privilege of having their own identities and values reflected in the laws, cultures, and social institutions (such as schools and neighborhoods) in which they operate, while, at the same time, viewing themselves as *raceless* (DiAngelo, 2018; Lewis, 2001; 2004). This notion of whiteness as the norm relates to Harris’s (1993) notion of whiteness as property and the rights to disposition- which associates whiteness with normative “goodness.”

Drawing on this concept of the *rights of disposition*, or the transferability of whiteness as property, whiteness functions in schools as exclusive white property tied to student performance and academic success is available only to those who adhere to white cultural norms around behavior, language, learning, and physical appearance (Harris, 1993). As Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) argue, “[w]hen students are rewarded only for conformity to perceived ‘white norms’ or sanctioned for cultural practices (e.g. dress, speech patterns, unauthorized conceptions of knowledge), white property is being rendered alienable.” (p.59)

Meanwhile, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1988) argues that in the colorblind/racial liberalism era that rejects notions of biological inferiority, white supremacy is perpetuated based on a race-neutral ideology in which those who do not assimilate or subscribe to white norms are viewed as deviant, amoral, and culturally deficient in a way that is not overtly attributed to race (Crenshaw, 1988; Onwuachi-Willig, 2017). Charles Mills (1997) puts forth the related concept of the “moral contract,” which he identifies as the dominant tool for racial domination, regulation, and control in the modern era. Similarly, other scholars have argued that cultural explanations for racism have replaced biological explanations, giving way to the “culture of poverty” thesis and claims that cultural deficiencies, rather than structural racism, are to blame for racial stratification in the

“colorblind” era (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Omi & Winant, 1994). These narratives are evidenced in modern forms of racial oppression like mass incarceration, intergenerational poverty, and the denial of educational rights that are regularly justified through cultural and moral arguments that blame the oppressed for laziness, criminality and bad behavior, and “deficient cultural values” (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995).

In this way, in the post-civil rights era, white supremacy continues to be engrained into legal, social, and political practices that promote ongoing racial subjugation through ideas about moral rather than biological superiority. I argue that in this current era of colorblind racism, discussed in more depth in the next section, racial status ideologies that rely on cultural and moral explanations for racism and are a key mechanism by which whites continue to construct a sense of superiority over those who are not white, while considering themselves to be non-racist.

Racial liberalism, colorblindness and colorblind racism.

A key theme of critical race theory is the *critique of colorblindness* or *critique of racial liberalism*, which was the dominant ideology that defined the post-World War II era characterized by an emphasis on the “corrosive effect of individual prejudice and the importance of interracial contact in promoting tolerance” in addition to the widespread acceptance that racism (synonymous with bigotry and hate) are largely a thing of the past (Guinier, 2004, p.95). Colorblind racism, which, according to Bonilla Silva (2018), is the dominant racial ideology in the current era, puts forth the message that racism did exist in the past and was unjust, but now it is over. Whites in today’s society generally claim to be non-racist, even taking pride in and advertising their lack of racial prejudice evidenced by their belief that they would never have committed the heinous acts that their ancestors did (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Bonilla-Silva (2018) introduces a component of his theory of colorblind ideology that is similar to the notion of *racial liberalism*, which he calls “abstract liberalism.” characterized by whites championing such causes as equal opportunity, choice, and fairness, while systematically refusing to address the structural nature of racism that explains ongoing racial stratification. Examining how racial liberalism was embedded in the case of school desegregation, Guinier (2004) argues that attorneys in *Brown* emphasized to liberal elites the immorality of racial discrimination in a way that would not challenge their status or disrupt society at large. Further, desegregation was viewed as a legal solution to educational inequality rather than a means through which equity could be achieved. Thus, following *Brown* and the halfhearted implementation of desegregation in some parts of the country, segregation could be portrayed through the lens of racial liberalism as a product of individual preferences rather than a deliberate and persistent mechanism through which whites possess control over and access to material and reputational educational goods.

In the “colorblind” era, race is a topic that is disregarded as a topic unworthy of discussion, and efforts to address racism by people of color are often dismissed as “playing the race card” or being racist themselves. As Doane (2003) writes, “race is defined as an illegitimate topic for conversation” in a colorblind world and “those who are conscious of race or who inject racial issues into a debate may be accused of complaining, of seeking special treatment, or ‘playing the race card,’ or even being racist.” (p.13)

In this way, whites can continue to benefit immensely from their racial privilege while also touting views that racism, if and when it does exist, is a problem of the morally degenerate rather than a structural and systemic force that requires a structural and systemic remedy. But as Lewis and Diamond (2015) argue, “In the post-civil rights era, the practices that sustain racial

inequality (and ultimately white supremacy) have not gone away but simply grown more elusive.” (p.8) Thus, whites in the “post-racial” era can simultaneously benefit from and strive to distance themselves from historical legacies of racism, all while structures of racism continue to operate in ways that systematically deny rights to people of color (McDermott & Sampson, 2005; Sue, 2004; Crouch, 2013; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Lewis, 2004). The ability to claim colorblindness serves to perpetuate and defend more nuanced forms of white supremacist ideology in which whites are portrayed as morally, rather biologically superior to people of color.

White Self-Interests and the Preservation of Whiteness

Critical scholars of race argue that racial structures and ideologies were created and maintained specifically to serve and uphold the interests of whites (Roediger, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As Roediger (1994) argues, whiteness as a constructed racial category is, at its core, about nothing but domination and oppression- those who benefit from the power and privileges it affords have nothing binding them together other than their investment in whiteness. Indeed, since race emerged as a mechanism for social organization in society, whites have benefitted “in both psychic and material ways from their occupancy at the top of the racial hierarchy and thus, have little incentive to dismantle it.” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p.7).

Thus, while individuals are social actors who are influenced by embedded structures of racism, I argue that they also have agency that gives them the ability to either interrupt or recreate patterns of inequality in society. Indeed, the construction and maintenance of whiteness in the United States has relied on the desires of whites- individually and collectively- to preserve and further their own self-interests at the expense of people of color (Doane, 2003; DuBois, 1935; Roediger, 1994).

In her theory of whiteness as property, Harris (1993) argues that the benefits associated with whiteness have become an expectation for whites who are accustomed to their racial privilege. When racial discrimination and segregation were explicitly enshrined in the law, whites were directly and specifically afforded full human rights and privileges based on their race that were simultaneously denied to people of color. Without such laws to legally guarantee whiteness as property, however, the expectation (and reality) of white privilege still exists in the post-civil rights era. Harris (1993) calls this “settled expectations” of whiteness, and argues that these expectations of whites that are built on current and historical benefits derived from a white supremacist society serve to reinforce white property interests and the subordination of blacks. Because whites benefit immeasurably from their racial status, have grown accustomed to privilege, and have little interest in giving it up, threats to whiteness can be very distressing. In the next section, I discuss literature on racial threat and white racial fear, which are attitudinal and emotional responses from whites that emerge as a result of feeling that their racial status or privilege is in jeopardy. This literature is useful in informing the common reactions of whites to changing racial demographics, racial progress, and the disruption of narratives of colorblindness that preserve white comfort and power.

Racial Threat and White Racial Fear

As discussed above, despite common narratives of colorblindness and racial liberalism, whites have a vested interest in maintaining white supremacy as a way of maintaining their own racial privilege. In fact, colorblind ideologies serve to obscure and perpetuate white supremacy while also putting forth false narratives about racial progress and equality. Furthermore, as explained in this section, whites do in fact feel and experience race intensely despite often claiming that they do not “see race.”

While much scholarship on racism and racial attitudes has focused on individual determinants and expressions of racism, sociological theorists in particular have emphasized the need to examine collective racial attitudes and emotions that are informed by the racialized experiences of group members in a racially stratified society (Bobo, 1983; Blumer, 1958). I argue therefore, that the study of white racialized emotions and attitudes can give credence to critical race theory critiques of colorblindness and racial liberalism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Furthermore, these attitudes and emotions have tangible consequences in relation to racism and racial inequality. As Leonardo (2009) argues, “racist ideology is driven by fear of, misinformation about, and distance from the racial other.” (p.33) Indeed, I argue based on my study in Parkwood that racial threat and fear often fueled whites’ perceptions, beliefs, and actions in ways that went far beyond the individual level and reinforced dominant racist ideologies and racial inequality in the district and schools.

Racial threat theory argues that white racial prejudice towards minoritized groups results from perceived threats to white privilege and racial status, rather than differences in culture or values (Craig & Richeson, 2014; Quillian, 1995; Blalock, 1967; Blumer, 1958). The related concept of racial fear has similarly been used to explain whites’ fear of losing their racial status and privilege (Jensen, 2005). In empirical applications of racial threat scholars have found that whites’ racial animosity increases in relation to the percentage of blacks that they interact with in their social environment (Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000; Blalock, 1967; Bobo, 1988; Fossett & Kiecolt, 1989; Giles & Evans, 1986; Taylor, 1986; Quillian, 1995).

For instance, in a study of white racial attitudes in the South during the Civil Rights Movement, Pettigrew (1959) found that anti-black attitudes were stronger in cities with larger black populations. Fosset and Kiecolt (1989) found that this rings true in cities across the

country, and that whites living in closer proximity with larger black populations were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward blacks and exhibited less support for racial integration. More recent experimental research by Craig and Richeson (2014) found that whites who were aware of racial demographic shifts leading to the declining white majority in the United States, were more likely to express negative attitudes towards minoritized groups as a result of perceived threats to their group status.

Quillian (1995) also found that economic factors can contribute to exacerbation of perceived threats and racial prejudice, particularly among whites who are experiencing economic hardship. Similarly, a 2000 study by Oliver and Mendelberg found that black population share is a negligible predictor of white racial attitudes because of the erection of segregated institutions to reduce whites' exposure to their black neighbors. Instead, they argue that the socioeconomic characteristic of the white community is a key determinant of white racial attitudes and perceptions of racial threat amongst whites- in that whites who are more similar to blacks in terms of socioeconomic status had more negative racial attitudes (Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000). Thus, Parkwood is an important context in which to study the extent to which whites experience feelings of racial threat due to demographic change and class similarities across racial groups.

Related to the concept of racial threat, Jensen (2005) presents a multi-component theory of racial fear exhibited by whites discussed below, which I use to guide my understanding of white experiences of racial fear in the current era. First is the fear of acknowledging that whites possess privileges that are unearned- that is, that dominant notions of meritocracy that exist in the collective white conscience are false. Second is the fear that if society becomes more equitable, whites will lose some of these unearned economic, political, and social privileges. And finally, the third component is the fear that people of other racial/ethnic groups will one day gain

power over whites in a similar way that whites currently maintain power over other racial groups. Hage (2003) presented a similar concept tied to collective white fear that coined “colonial white paranoia,” a “pathological form of fear based on an excessively fragile conception of the self as constantly threatened” (p.49) even in cases where no threat is present.

These theories of racial threat and fear are helpful in considering the racial ideologies and actions of whites in the current sociopolitical context. In Parkwood, I explored how racial fear and threat were related to concerns of whites about changing racial demographics in the community, which led those that I interviewed and observed to respond in ways that re-asserted their power and privilege. This was perhaps more prominent in Parkwood than in other racially diverse school districts and communities, based on the fact that whites in Parkwood have slightly lower levels of income and education than residents of color, which in light of the work discussed above, may have exacerbated their feelings of fear that they were in danger of losing their power in the community and schools (Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000; Quillian, 1995; Jenson, 2005).

Conclusion: Using Theory to Understand how Whiteness Operates Within Schools

The theories of race and racism discussed in this chapter highlight the iterative processes by which structures of racism and white supremacy are internalized into emotions and ideologies, influence social action, are institutionalized in policies and practices that govern and structure our society, and bend and shift in relation to social context. Thus, as Bonilla-Silva (2018) argues, “the task of analysts interested in studying racial structures is to uncover the particular social, economic, political, social control, and ideological mechanisms responsible for the reproduction of racial privilege in a society.” (p.9)

Critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, and sociological theories of race and racism informed my understanding of the impact of and the extent to which race and structures of racism were embedded the dominant ideologies and institutions of a previously all-white and demographically changing suburban school district. Informed by these theoretical perspectives, I aimed to understand how white parents in particular made sense of notions of status and reputation in their school and community in relation to broad patterns of racial demographic change and dominant racial ideologies and emotions. Moreover, I examined how this meaning making influenced their actions within the school district and the extent to which policies and practices at the institutional level in schools and the district maintained racial stratification as its population became more racially and ethnically diverse. What I found through this research is that the individual meaning making and behaviors of whites in Parkwood very much reflected and recreated broad structures of racial inequality in the local schools.

CHAPTER THREE

Literature Review

In this chapter, guided by the theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter Two, which help me to understand racism as produced and reproduced through interrelated ideological and institutional forces, I review literature on school segregation and desegregation- and particularly the ways in which white privilege is reasserted in racially segregated and diverse schools across historical, political, and educational contexts. In order to identify and document how whiteness functioned as a form of power and a mechanism for racial inequality and Parkwood, it was necessary for me to understand how white supremacy is deeply embedded in the institutions and ideologies that structure our educational system- from education policy and practice to the behaviors, actions, and perspectives of white parents, school leaders, and policymakers (Leonardo, 2007; Leonardo & Grubb, 2019).

Schools are sites that regularly privilege white students and exclude students of color- especially black and brown students- from educational opportunities that would support and grow their academic, socio-emotional, and cultural selves. This exclusion of students of color occurs both materially, through the distribution of and access to resources (e.g. through segregation, tracking, and unequal funding), and socioculturally (e.g. through norms, school climate, and relationships within schools) (Carter, 2012). Moreover, as I document based on my research in Parkwood, the ideologies of colorblindness and race neutrality that characterize the post-civil rights “common sense” understandings of the causes of educational inequality, tend to attribute disparate academic outcomes to individual motivations, values, and abilities and

obscure and decenter attention to structural causes (Leonardo, 2007, 2009, 2013; Matias, 2016; Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

Indeed, while discussions around racial disparities in education today are often focused on addressing the *achievement gap*- which frames the “problem” as a function of the supposed intellectual and cultural deficiencies of students and families- these discussions rarely acknowledge the historical and ongoing structures of racism that have systematically, through overt and more covert mechanisms, separated students of color from opportunity and inclusion (Leonardo, 2007; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). Moreover, we must also consider the ways in which white norms, assumptions, and ideologies structure and govern education policy and practice at multiple levels- from the construction and measurement of intelligence and academic success to sociocultural practices and norms tied to a school’s “logic for student conduct and presentation of self, its pedagogical content and practices, and its climate of teacher-student, student-student, and other intergroup or intragroup dynamics.” (Carter, 2012, p.4)

In the sections that follow, I review research that highlights the various forms of marginalization and exclusion that occur within and between schools as a result of the continuous centering of white norms and interests. First, I discuss research on the implementation of and resistance to school desegregation policies, the potential promises of which were never realized because white power structures and racist ideologies recreated and justified new and ongoing forms of exclusion of students, families, teachers and leaders of color. I then review literature on school choice and ongoing school segregation and resegregation in the modern era of colorblind student assignment policies, stemming from residential housing patterns and the segregating school choices of white parents. In the final section, I provide an overview of recent research on white privilege and power within racially diverse schools.

This literature informs my understanding of the motivations of some white parents to choose diverse schools for their children, as well as how racial inequality and exclusion are often maintained within these spaces. Together with the theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter Two, this review of literature informs my examination of the interconnected ideologies, actions, and institutions that led to the ongoing maintenance of white privilege and power in Parkwood schools.

School Desegregation, White Interests, and Black Exclusion

Most efforts by education policymakers—however inadequate—to foster racial equity in education have focused on addressing access to material opportunities through policies such as desegregation, detracking, and equalization of funding across schools and classrooms. School desegregation in particular has been touted by many educational researchers as one of the most effective ways to create more equitable schools (Orfield & Lee, 2001; Frankenberg & Orfield, 2003; Mickelson, 2008). Furthermore, researchers have emphasized the benefits of racially diverse learning environments, including short and long-term academic outcomes, strengthened critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and improvements in cross-racial and cross-cultural understanding (Wells, 1995; Wells & Crain, 1994; Schofield, 1991; Wells, Fox & Cordova-Cobo, 2016). However, it is important to differentiate between the concepts of desegregation and integration, as school desegregation only went so far, failing to achieve meaningful integration, inclusion, and equity of opportunity in schools, because of white resistance and because policy efforts prioritized the interests of whites in ways that led to further marginalization of black students within desegregated schools (Horsford, 2019; Wells, Holme, Revilla & Atanda, 2004; 2009; Feagin, 1980; Walker, 2018).

Scholars who advocate for school desegregation have often mourned the loss of desegregation policies that were implemented in some districts and have largely been dismantled over the past 20-30 years (Orfield & Yun, 1999; Orfield, 2001; Boger & Orfield, 2009). What is too often missing, however, from dominant narratives on school desegregation are the stories of white resistance and the ways that desegregated schools “often reproduced racial inequality by maintaining the white privilege of the larger society within the context of desegregated schools.” (Wells et.al, 2004, p.49).

Indeed, when desegregation policies were implemented, they were done so in ways that in most cases put the bulk of the burden of desegregation on the African American community, sometimes resulting in the closing of black schools, firing of black teachers, and loss of the culture of care, pride, and high expectations that was part of the educational experience of some majority black schools (Walker, 1996; Fairclough, 2006; Horsford, 2019, Wells et.al, 2004). Black students attending previously all-white schools were also often treated with hostility and resentment by whites (Bell, 2004; Dumas, 2007; 2014) Furthermore, policies that desegregated school buildings have often been met with resegregation between classrooms through the use of tracking and ability grouping (Oakes, 1985; Mickelson, 2001; Metz, 1978, 2003).

The research on the too-often overlooked story of how white privilege and power was reproduced within desegregated schools provides important context to my understanding of racial dynamics in Parkwood in several ways. First, the community is often described as a “post-racial” utopia, as evidenced by its level of racial diversity. However, the critical literature on school desegregation that highlights the sociocultural and material ways in which black students were denied full inclusion in desegregated schools emphasizes the need to look beyond the racial

makeup of a school to examine the ideologies and institutions that often reproduce and legitimate ongoing stratification in diverse spaces.

Race, Status, and School Choice in the Post-Racial Era

School segregation in the “post-racial” era is often referred to as “de facto,” that is, segregation resulting from practice rather than from legal mandate- and is regularly attributed to residential segregation and the housing and school choices of individuals- rather than to structural causes (Rothstein, 2017). However, residential segregation today is very much a remnant of prior legal forms of housing discrimination and intergenerational wealth inequality (Rothstein, 2017). Moreover, the school and housing choices of white parents are often guided by associations between the quality and status of schools and students that are also reflected in how schools are measured and ranked based on standardized test scores (Wells et.al, 2014; Holme, 2002, Leonardo, 2013). In this way, cultural and moral manifestations of racist ideologies serve as colorblind mechanisms by which whites can continue to resist to integration and hoard educational resources.

Indeed, it is well-documented in education research that when making school choice decisions, parents with higher levels of privilege and wealth (particularly white and middle-upper class parents) are better able to gain access to “higher quality” schools for their children by moving to a particular school district or paying for private school (Holme, 2002; Reay et.al, 2011; Posey-Maddox et.al, 2014; Scott, 2015). Parents with means are able to draw on their own economic, social, and cultural capital to get their children into the most in-demand schools (Holme, 2002; Lareau, 2003; Roda, 2013).

The existing qualitative research on white parents suggests that they not only tend to choose mainly white, privileged schools, but that they also put a great deal of time and energy

into finding the “right” privileged school for their children. They often rely on social networks and the opinions of other white parents in order to choose the school(s) that are considered to be highest “quality”, have the best reputations and those that are the best “fit” for their child- factors that are often closely tied to the racial/ethnic composition of schools (Wells et.al, 2014; Roda, 2013; Lareau, 2014; Wells et.al, 2018). In other words, prior research suggests that white, middle-and upper-middle class parents in particular are heavily swayed by the ways in which the perceived status of schools are socially constructed and perceived by their white peers (Roda & Wells, 2013; Wells et.al., 2014; Wells et.al., 2018). These collective, racialized understandings of school quality are often more powerful in the minds of white parents than data on academic outcomes or even the specific educational needs of their children (Wells et.al., 2014). On a more macro level, it is influenced by and contributes heavily to the on-going racial and ethnic segregation in our educational system (Holme, 2012; Wells et.al., 2014; Lareau, 2014).

Furthermore, researchers have demonstrated that white parents tend to use the racial makeup of a school’s student population as a proxy indicator for quality and desirability, and often associate schools with high concentrations of students in poverty and/or students of color with being lower *status* (Johnson and Shapiro, 2003; Posey-Maddox et.al., 2014; Wells et.al, 2014; Holme, 2002; Wells, 2018). School choice decisions and perceptions of school quality are “mediated by status ideologies that emphasize race and class” (Holme, 2002, p.178). In fact, school reputations- and the home prices for living in a particular district- are significantly related to the percentage of non-white residents regardless of tangible measures of school and home quality (Wells et.al., 2014).

Thus, this research provides evidence of how Weber’s notion of the *social estimation of honor* and the reputational and status properties of whiteness are manifested in the relationship

between perceptions of school “quality” and white parents’ school choices. In this way, resistance to integration policies that could create more equitable distributions of educational resources is legitimated using so-called “race-neutral,” culturally and morally- based racial status ideologies about what constitutes a good school that, along with education policies that fail to address structural forms of racial exclusion, serve to reproduce patterns of segregation and the monopolization of resources by white parents.

White Parents, Power, and Privilege in Diverse Schools

In contrast to the research discussed above that helps to explain the racial status ideologies and perceptions of cultural inferiority of students of color that serve to legitimate modern-day school segregation, in this section, I review recent literature on white parents whose children attend racially diverse schools. First, I provide an overview of research on the school choice decisions of white parents who actively seek out racially diverse schools for their children, followed by a discussion of literature that shows how even white parents who claim to value diversity and racial equity often use their privilege and power in ways that exclude students of color in these schools from resources and opportunities.

Embracing diversity? White parents and “against the grain” school choices.

A growing body of research has studied a small, but significant number of white parents who are making what has been referred to as “against the grain” school choices (Reay et.al., 2011) by choosing to send their children to racially diverse schools. For advocates of school desegregation, this work can provide an encouraging story, and it is certainly an interesting contrast to the wealth of social science research on white parents’ resistance to enrolling their children in diverse schools. The majority of this research discussed below has focused on white, middle and upper class parents choosing schools in gentrifying, urban neighborhoods (Cucchiara

& Horvat, 2009; 2013; Reay et.al., 2011; Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Posey-Maddox et.al., 2014).

A key finding from across these studies is that these white parents considered their choices to be an enactment of their progressive, liberal-minded identities (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Reay et.al., 2011; Posey-Maddox et.al., 2014). While they placed importance on finding a quality school for their child, they were also often critical of the unequal, segregated educational landscape, and opted to invest in improving their local public school (Reay et.al, 2011; Cucchiara, 2013; Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg and Cucchiara, 2014). They cited their value of diversity as a key reason for their school choices, and expressed that they wanted their children to go to schools that mirrored what they would experience in the “real world” (Posey-Maddox et.al., 2014).

These studies also point out, however, that the decisions of white parents who acted “against the grain” by choosing to send their children to racially diverse schools did not come easily. They were all weighing different values and priorities, and were often riddled with anxiety over doing what was best for their children versus what was best for the larger society (Reay, 2008; Reay et.al., 2011; Cucchiara, 2013). Some, for example, worried about what others would think of their decision to choose what were viewed by some as “bad school[s]” because they enrolled a substantial proportion of students of color (Reay, 2008, p.1078), and others were plagued by concerns over safety and disorder (Cucchiara, 2013). Indeed, while these parents described themselves as having deeply-held beliefs about what was “morally right” and good for the collective society, they still struggled over how to balance these values with status ideologies related to race and school quality, as well as their individual self-interests- particularly in terms

of passing on their privilege to their children (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Cucchiara, 2013; Reay et.al., 2011).

Another interesting concept emerging from recent literature on white parents who seemingly break down boundaries- at least physical ones- by choosing diverse urban schools for their children is that of “multicultural capital” (Reay et.al., 2007; Reay et.al., 2011). This work has found that white, middle class families who embody the normative culture that is valued in society were choosing to send their children to diverse schools at least in part because they felt that their white children could benefit from exposure to children of other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Many of these parents explained that they wanted their children to grow up to be tolerant and well-rounded, as well as “socially fluent and adaptable” in racially and ethnically diverse environments (Reay et.al., 2007, p.1045). Reay et.al. (2007) point out the importance of making a distinction in the explanations white parents give to describe their school choices between the moral and anti-racist motivations for seeking diverse schools, and motivations that are based on the idea that they will secure advantages for their white children vis-à-vis students of color. Thus, desires for altruism and racial integration, for these parents, may be closely intertwined with desires to bolster their child’s chances for success in an increasingly global and multiracial society (Reay et.al., 2007).

Race, power, and inequality in diverse schools.

As the critical literature on school desegregation has shown, it is necessary to examine what actually happens at the micro-level in diversifying schools, as policies and practice often reproduce segregation within schools, and the privilege white parents can lead to unequal power dynamics and efforts to shape education in a manner that often not in the best interest of students and families of color (Posey-Maddox, 2014; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013, Reay et.al., 2011;

Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Fox, Wells, Walker & Swen, 2017). The research discussed in this section highlights important findings that show how racial inequality persists even in schools that tout diversity as symbolic of racial equity.

Indeed, literature on how issues of race, whiteness, and privilege play out in diverse schools has drawn attention to the ways in which white families, even those who value multicultural diversity at the surface level, often impose their own educational norms and standards upon schools that they move into, which may not be in line with the previous school cultures that were built by families and students of color (Posey-Maddox, 2014, Cucchiara, 2013; Posey-Maddox et.al., 2014; Fox et.al, 2017). Importantly, white, gentrifying parents have often viewed the neighborhoods and schools that they “colonize” through a deficit lens that does not honor the knowledge, culture, and values of communities of color, and sometimes view themselves as altruistic “saviors” of poor, predominantly black and/or Latinx schools in ways that reproduce ideologies about race, status, and cultural superiority of whites within schools (Fox et.al, 2017).

Furthermore, some parents who seek out diverse schools use their privilege to push to get their children into courses that are seen as more rigorous and elite within the school, leading to the reproduction of internal segregation, disparities in academic outcomes, and racialized ideas about which students belong in which classes (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Fox et.al., 2017). Disciplinary practices also serve to exclude, isolate, and dehumanize students of color in diverse schools where the behavior of black and Latinx students in particular is often viewed differently from that of white students, resulting in them being disciplined more often and in harsher ways, including for lack of conformity to white cultural norms that govern the school rules (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Carter, 2012). This research, therefore, points to the

critical need to examine the explicit and implicit institutional treatment and perceptions of students of color in diverse schools.

Conclusion: Filling a gap

The literature discussed in this chapter highlights how racialized power structures and ideologies that continuously privilege white students and families have served to undermine the potential benefits of diverse schools and continuously marginalize students of color. These findings raise important concerns about the potential for school desegregation/diversity to create harmful environments for students of color that must be understood and avoided in any future efforts to implement school desegregation.

Recent research on white parents choosing racially diverse schools provides a valuable understanding of the individual attitudes and beliefs that shape their school choices and actions. However, I argue that much of this research has placed too much attention on individual identities and beliefs, and have not thoroughly examined how the meaning-making of white parents is often embedded in broader structures and legacies of systemic racism and collective racial ideologies. Guided by the theoretical perspectives presented in Chapter Two, I approached my research in Parkwood with the goal of understanding not only how parents understand school quality and reputation related to racial demographics as individual actors, but also how those beliefs are constructed within and reflect broader structures of racism.

In addition, research on white parents' school choices and actions within diverse schools has focused predominantly on parents seeking racially diverse schools in urban areas. Thus, there is a need for a deeper and more critical exploration of how these processes are playing out in demographically changing suburban schools. White suburban parents like those in Parkwood, who are not actively seeking out multiracial communities and schools, but rather, are passive

recipients of demographic change, are likely to be making sense of and responding to racial diversity in their communities in very different ways than the urban gentrifiers that have been well-documented in the literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the research design and methods I used to study the meaning-making of white parents and institutional responses to demographic change in the previously all-white suburban community of Parkwood, as well as the extent to which white power and privilege were maintained and reasserted in this context. My methodological approach was informed by sociological theory on the duality social structures- that is, the notion that social structures both influence and are influenced by the ideologies and actions of social actors (Giddens, 1979; 1984; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008). Thus, I developed a multi-modal, qualitative research methodology that would allow me to understand the complex interplay between the racialized meaning making and behaviors of white parents and the broader, structural and contextual dimensions of race and racial inequality in the post-civil rights era. In this way, I aimed to understand how racial schemas, or “generalized procedures in the enactment/reproduction of social life,” (Sewell, 1992, p.8) such as individual racial attitudes and collective ideologies interacted with structures such as the unequal distribution of power and resources in economic and political forms as well as that which is derived from racial status and privilege (Weber, 1978; Gerth & Mills, 1946; Ridgeway, 2014).

The development of my theoretical framework, research questions, and methodology occurred through an iterative and reflexive process over the course of the study (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). As Berkowitz (1997) writes, qualitative analysis requires “a loop-like pattern of multiple rounds of revisiting the data as additional questions emerge, new connections are unearthed, and more complex formulations develop along with a deepening understanding of the

material.” (quoted in Srivastava & Hopwood p.77) Thus, throughout the research process, I built on, refined, and focused my theoretical framework and research questions in response to emerging findings in the data and in turn, used new theoretical understandings and personal reflections to inform and adjust my research methods where appropriate.

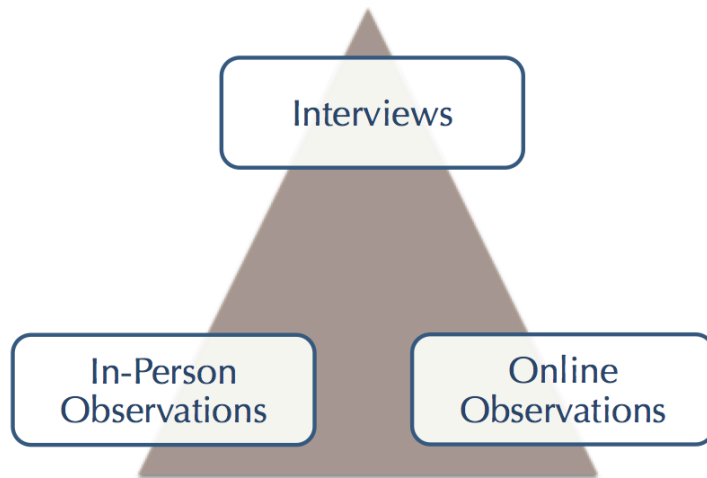
Guided by my theoretical framework and identification of the gaps in relevant literature, I designed this study to address the following research questions:

- 1) How do white, middle-class suburban parents of school-aged children make sense of and respond to increasing racial and ethnic diversity in a previously white suburban community and school district?
- 2) To what extent and in what ways are racial stratification, inequality, and unequal power dynamics maintained in these schools as the white population decreases?

Research Design: A Critical, Multi-Modal Qualitative Study

Given the nature of my research questions, which were aimed at understanding deep-seated meaning making and actions of whites in relation to ideological and institutional racism in a demographically changing suburban community, I employed a multi-modal qualitative case study design (illustrated in Figure 2 below). My data collection consisted of in-depth interviews with Parkwood parents, teachers, community members and school leaders in addition to online and on-site fieldwork in the district. Qualitative research was the ideal methodological approach for understanding how white residents of Parkwood interpreted and made meaning of the changing racial makeup of their community, as it is grounded in a constructivist paradigm, with the understanding that “individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds” (Merriam, 2016, p.24).

Figure 2. Multi-Modal Case Study Methodology



I elected to use a case study method as opposed to other qualitative approaches because I studied the phenomenon of white responses to demographic change within the “bounded context” of one particular suburban community in the current sociopolitical era (Merriam, 2016). According to Yin (2009), case study methods are ideal for those who aim to develop an in-depth understanding of a real-world phenomenon that encompasses contextual conditions relevant to the phenomenon of focus. Similarly, Bartlet & Vavrus (2017) describe case study research as particularly appropriate for studies which “consider how social actors, with diverse motives, intentions, and levels of influence, work in tandem with and/or in response to social forces to routinely produce the social and cultural worlds in which they live.” (p.1) This effort to examine the behaviors and meaning making of social actors *in relation to* their social contexts and social structures (Giddens, 1984) stands in contrast to other methodological approaches, such as experimental research, that aims to divorce or control for contextual factors in order to isolate relationships between a small number of variables (Yin, 2009). As the demographic change, dominant racial ideologies, and economic/educational similarities across racial groups in Parkwood are central to my analysis, a case study methodology was appropriate.

Moreover, my methodology was developed and refined using a critical research lens (Merriam, 2016). My research design, data collection methods, and data analysis were informed by critical theories on race and whiteness, with an aim to “critique and challenge, to transform, and to analyze power relations” (Merriam, 2016, p.59) that are created and maintained in racially diverse schools and districts. As power dynamics are a central focus, critical researchers generally seek to answer questions related to who possesses power and how it is maintained and negotiated (Merriam, 2016).

Critical research generally operates with an understanding that “people unconsciously accept things the way they are, and in doing so, reinforce the status quo.” (Merriam, 2016, p.61) Therefore, using a critical whiteness studies approach, I aimed to reveal invisible structures that maintain and exacerbate racial hierarchies in schools and contribute to the marginalization of students and parents of color in the era of colorblindness. Thus, I analyzed interview and observation data from my research in Parkwood with the goal of understanding the meaning making of my participants in the context of, and in relation to, racial power dynamics and the broader historical, political, and social context of the community and the country overall (Merriam, 2016).

Site Selection: Parkwood as a Case for Exploring Suburban Demographic Change

As discussed in Chapter One, suburbs across the United States have been rapidly changing in recent years, and there is a critical need for more research examining how demographic change in suburban communities plays out in public schools. Below, I present contextual data on Parkwood to highlight why it is a compelling case in which to explore this topic. These data were gathered through my interviews and observations, as well as through multiple secondary sources of information such as Census and ACS data, state and district level

information on the schools and community, district documents, and other local resources including newspaper articles, historical archives, and maps. To protect the anonymity of the community and my participants, where necessary, I provide high-level summaries of my overall understandings of the context of this place across primary and secondary data sources rather than quoting or referencing specific sources that would reveal the identity of the location or individuals.

The suburban community that I chose for this case study, Parkwood, is an ideal site in which to understand the responses of white residents and school leaders to demographic change for a number of reasons. Parkwood is an inner-ring suburb located near a large U.S. city that has seen dramatic demographic changes over the last few decades. The overall population of the suburban county in which Parkwood is located is similar in current demographic makeup to the United States overall and has changed over the past few decades as more residents of color have moved in, but has remained highly fragmented and segregated across municipal and school district boundaries. Parkwood is still racially “diverse,” albeit with a continually shrinking white population, in the midst of demographic change. Many others communities in the county have remained nearly entirely white or have shifted even more dramatically to become predominantly black and/or Latinx as a result of white flight, much like other suburbs in flux across the country (Orfield & Luce, 2013; Wells et.al., 2014). For some residents, the diversity in the community is considered to be evidence of Parkwood’s status as a multicultural, “post-racial” utopia of sorts.

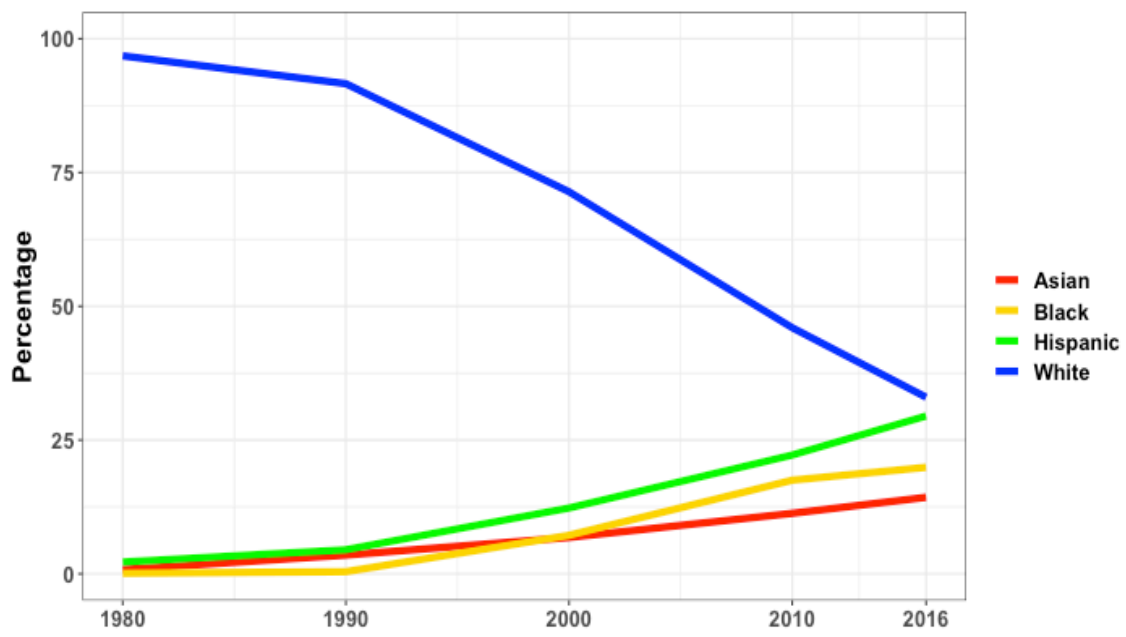
Demographic change.

Prior to the 20th Century, Parkwood and its surrounding areas were still mostly rural, and the land was used primarily for agricultural purposes. In the 1930s, development in Parkwood began to accelerate, and the area became better connected to the metropolitan area nearby. As the

community was established as a suburb, it became, over time, a destination for mostly white-collar commuters to the nearby city. Initially populated by residents of Italian, Jewish, and Irish heritage, the community was nearly 100 percent white until recent decades. The population of Parkwood and neighboring suburbs grew during the mid-20th century, at the same time that the bordering city was seeing an influx of African-American residents during the Great Migration. The white residents that moved to Parkwood were coming mostly from the nearby city, in search of the idyllic suburban dream.

As discussed in Chapter One, as late as 1990, the Parkwood population was still over 90 percent white. Now, less than three decades later, the percentage white in Parkwood is less than 40 percent. The black population makes up about 20 percent of the total residential population, while Asians comprise nearly 15 percent and Latinx residents comprise about 30 percent of the population. See Figure 3 below for demographic changes in Parkwood by racial subgroup over time.

Figure 3. Parkwood Residential Population Change 1980-2016



(Sources: U.S. Census 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010; ACS 2016 5-year estimates)

As Susan, one of the white parents that I interviewed who grew up in Parkwood noted about the community, “Demographically speaking, it’s much more diverse than it was. When I was a kid, you were pretty much Irish or Italian if you lived here. I mean, there were others, but when I say others, you may have been Polish. Everybody was European of descent, but mostly Irish and Italian. Of course, now we have everything.” Another life-long Parkwood resident, Daniel, talked about the diversity in the community that he thought was a great asset, “It’s like the World’s Fair. There are so many different cultures represented, you know Arabic people, Indian, Pakistani, Asians of all descents, African, Caribbean...I mean it’s like going to the UN. It’s incredible.”

The extent to which the proportion of white residents in Parkwood has decreased, particularly in the last two decades, has been attributed by those I interviewed to a number of factors. Like the rest of the country, the birth, migration, and immigration rates for residents of color have exceeded those for white residents, coupled with an aging and dying white population (Frey, 2015). There has also been a substantial amount of white flight from Parkwood in recent years by residents who, unlike Susan and Daniel, do not value the racial and cultural changes in the community. Most of these residents, according to my interviews, have moved to communities outside of the metropolitan area and to outer-ring suburban areas that have remained nearly all white to this day.

Socioeconomic indicators.

Parkwood is currently well within the bounds of what is considered to be a middle-class community based on nation-wide averages, with a median household income of about \$90,000 (American Community Survey, 2017a) and a median home value of about \$375,000, which is quite high compared to national averages. However, this is actually somewhat low for the county

in which it is located, which has an average median income of over \$105,000 and a median home price of about \$550,000 (American Community Survey, 2017b). The region surrounding the community, as mentioned above, is highly fragmented and segregated, with many very affluent, mostly white communities and a number of predominantly black and Latinx areas that have seen more substantial rates of white flight and disinvestment. The region as a whole has one of the highest average costs of living in the country, and property taxes are especially high because of the extreme fragmentation across school districts. Many of the residents I spoke with noted that they chose to live in Parkwood because they wanted to be in a suburban community with good schools and it was the only such place in the area that they could afford to buy a home. Parkwood families, particularly whites, reported in the interviews that while they are financially stable, they are struggling more than residents of more affluent communities nearby to keep up with increasing costs, particularly following the great recession.

In terms of education levels, approximately 30 percent of Parkwood residents age 25 and over have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, which mirrors the proportion in the U.S. population overall (American Community Survey, 2017c). Perhaps most notably, Asian and black Parkwood residents have levels of higher educational attainment than white and Hispanic residents overall (American Community Survey, 2017c). This rang true in my interviews, as many of the parents of color I spoke with tended to have obtained higher-level (such as masters or doctoral) degrees than the white parents I interviewed, most of whom had a bachelor's degree or less from small regional or community colleges.

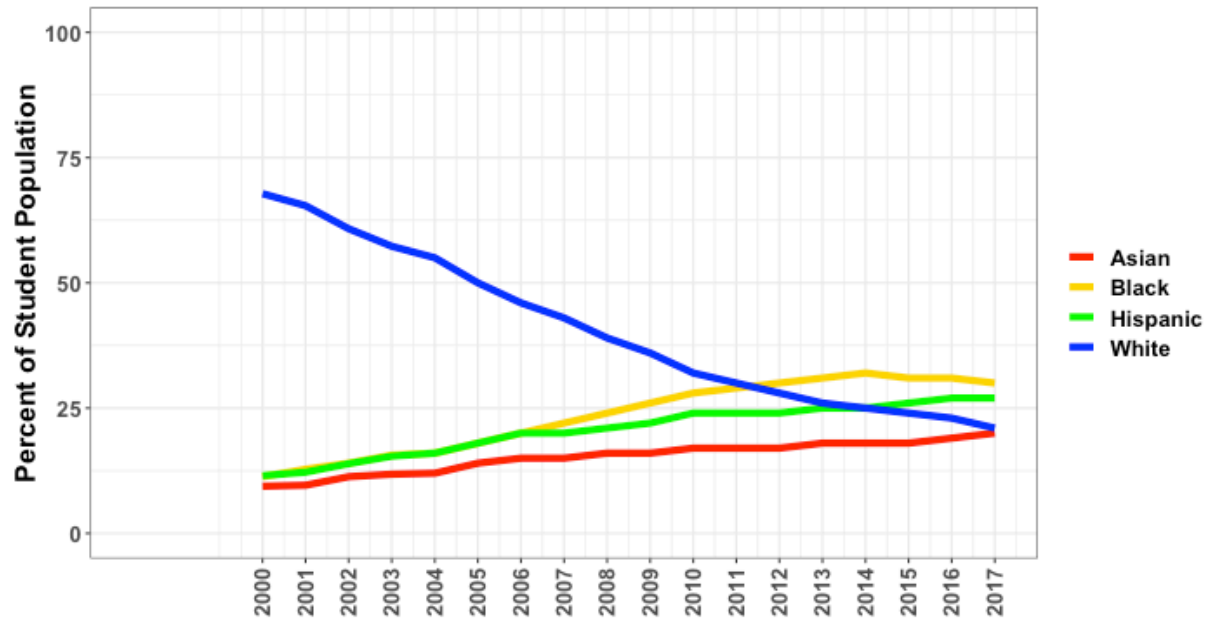
White residents in Parkwood also have similar, but slightly lower median household income levels than black, Hispanic, and Asian residents in Parkwood (American Community Survey, 2017a). While these numbers do not capture rates of *wealth*, and thus do not tell the full

story of socioeconomic differences across racial groups, this context is important when comparing the meaning making of white parents in Parkwood to other white parents in suburban and urban communities who may have more knowledge and resources to control the extent to and manner by which their children experience “diversity.” Indeed, the bulk of the existing research on white parents in diverse schools has focused on those in gentrifying urban areas or affluent suburbs, in which white parents tend to have obtained higher levels of education and wealth than the parents of color in their schools (Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Cucchiara & Horvat, 2013; Reay et.al., 2011; Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Posey-Maddox et.al., 2014). Therefore, the Parkwood context, in which education and income levels are relatively similar across racial groups, adds an important missing component to the literature on whiteness and racial power dynamics in racially diverse schools and communities.

The Parkwood School District

The Parkwood school district, like the community as a whole, is experiencing demographic changes that are typical of a growing number suburban districts across the country. There are a total of ten elementary schools and three paired middle & high schools in the district. The school system serves slightly less than 10,000 students in all schools. The public school population has changed dramatically from over 90 percent white in 1993 to 72 percent white in 2000 and only 22 percent white in 2017. Figure 4 below illustrates the demographic changes in the Parkwood school district from the 2000 to 2017.

Figure 4. Racial Demographic Change in the Parkwood School District, 2000-2017



(Source: NCES CCD Elementary/Secondary Information System)

Importantly, these demographic changes have not occurred evenly across all schools in the community. This is true at both the elementary and secondary school levels, however, I focus my study on secondary schools. There are three secondary school pathways in the district; each middle school feeds directly into a paired high school. Each pair of secondary schools collaborate regularly, share resources—including teachers—and are located next to one another so that they operate essentially as one school unit for middle to high school grades. For the purposes of this dissertation, I refer each of the middle/high schools collectively as Riverside, Easthaven, and Westview. When students have completed elementary school, they are assigned based on their residence to one of the three schools. However, the district employs an intra-district transfer policy, discussed below, which allows parents to transfer their children out of their assigned middle/high school into one of the others within the district.

Secondary schools and the intra-district transfer policy.

I chose to focus specifically secondary schools for a number of reasons. First, in this district, the transition from elementary to secondary school is the most common time in which parents are actively analyzing and choosing which school to send their child to, and whether or not to use the transfer policy, which, as I learned early on in my interviews, is a highly racialized process. Furthermore, as there are only three secondary school options in the district, the racial/ethnic makeup of students in these larger schools is more reflective of the demographic patterns in the community as a whole than are the elementary schools, which are smaller and generally more racially isolated. Thus, these schools were better sites through which to study the responses of white parents, school officials, and other stakeholders to racial demographic change. However, enrollment by race is not balanced across the secondary schools. See Table 1 below for demographic data of students in Parkwood's three secondary school pairings.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Parkwood Secondary School Students

| | Black | White | Hispanic | Asian | Multi | ED | SWD | ELL |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Riverside | 41% | 10% | 28% | 20% | 1% | 42% | 15% | 1% |
| Easthaven | 20% | 45% | 20% | 15% | 0% | 25% | 15% | 9% |
| Westview | 24% | 28% | 27% | 21% | 0% | 33% | 12% | 1% |

(ED= Economically Disadvantaged; SWD= Students with Disabilities; ELL= English Language Learners.)

Intra-district transfer policy.

Students in Parkwood are assigned to one of three secondary schools based on their residential location, but are allowed to use the district's transfer policy to switch to any of the other schools in the district before their first entry into the school (at the completion of elementary school or the grade that they begin in Parkwood if they transfer from another district). Once their school has been selected, students must remain in that school and its feeder

high school for the remainder of their secondary school careers. The transfer policy states that decisions of whether to grant transfers are made on a case-by-case basis and are based on each school's available capacity. However, according to district officials, transfer requests are rarely if ever denied. If a particular school has reached capacity, transfer requests are first granted to students whose siblings already attend the school. All other requests are to be entered into a lottery to allocate the remaining spaces.

The transfer policy has been in place since the late 1960s based on my interviews and Board of Education documents, although according to interviews with numerous parents, residents, district leaders and administrators who have lived in the district since that time, it was rarely used until the more recent demographic changes began to occur in the 1990s and 2000s. One school in particular, Riverside, is the closest of the three to the urban border and has experienced the sharpest decline in its white population due to a combination of residential change, white flight, and the use of the transfer policy by white parents. Since 2013, Riverside's white student population has been stable at about 10 percent, but approximately 100-120 students per year (out of an incoming class of about 400), most of whom are white, have used the transfer policy to attend one of the other two schools for at least the past five years. Easthaven and Westview have higher percentages of white students but similar academic outcomes to Riverside. Most often, these students transfer to Easthaven, the secondary school option with the highest proportion of white students of the three. Unfortunately, I was not able to conduct official analyses of these trends as the district was unwilling to release data on the transfer policy use over time.

While the transfer policy has been the source of some controversy in the district, particularly among Riverside parents who are frustrated with the negative perception of the

school, and school leaders who are experiencing difficulty as a result of the loss of students and the per-pupil funding that follows them to their transfer school, my respondents discussed the policy as something that was unlikely to be eliminated. However, during the time that I was collecting data in Parkwood, a committee of parents was convened by the school board to evaluate the policy and consider possible changes to its implementation. I discuss the institutional culture surrounding this policy, the discussions during these meetings, and the justifications for its use by parents and school leaders in more depth in Chapter Seven.

Parkwood's "Leavers," "Choosers," and "Stayers."

The intra-district transfer policy contributes to my rationale for why Parkwood is an ideal site for this study because it adds a layer of complexity to the decisions that white parents are making in this district related to school quality and racial demographic change. As will be discussed further in my findings chapters, some white residents from Parkwood (who I call "Leavers") chose to flee the district altogether- whether by moving or sending their children to private schools- in order to avoid schools that were enrolling increasing numbers of students of color. The transfer policy has provided others (the "Choosers") who either did not want to or were unable to leave the Parkwood district with an option to escape Riverside in particular, which was the first secondary school to begin to shift away from having a predominantly white population beginning in the 1990s, and now has the smallest proportion of white students of the three secondary school options. Riverside administrators noted that the number of transfers from their school has increased over time in relation to the proportion of students of color.

Moreover, while very few white students remain in Riverside less than 30 years since the changes first began, a small proportion of parents (the "Stayers") have chosen to remain over the years. In light of the trends of white flight from Parkwood and much research that points to the

tendency of white parents to avoid selecting racially diverse schools for their children (Card & Rothstein, 2006; Dougherty et.al., 2009; Epps, 2002; Stinchcombe, McDill, & Walker, 1969), this made the white parents who stay in Riverside (the “Stayers”) a compelling and unique group of parents to study in the context of demographic change across the country. I wondered at the start of my research, for instance, if these parents were making sense of race, status, and school quality in different ways than others in the community. Furthermore, there is a lack of studies of racially diverse schools that focus on those in which white families who remain comprise a small percentage of the population overall.

Furthermore, this context in Riverside interested me in light of literature on white fear and anxiety in contexts in which their majority status is threatened (Craig & Richeson, 2014; Major, Blodorn, & Major Blascovich, 2018). I wondered, then, if these parents in Riverside were experiencing similar fears, or if they were more comfortable than other white parents in environments in which they might potentially have less racial comfort and privilege. Thus, I focused much of my data collection on interviews and observations in Riverside to examine whether whites being in a numerical “minority” in this school resulted in unique racial power dynamics that might challenge the privilege and comfort of white parents and students.

Secondary school “quality” indicators.

Recent efforts to rank and evaluate schools based on “school quality measures” such as test scores are considered by some, especially proponents of school choice, to be a valuable way to provide information to parents who are making school choice decisions. However, this work has also demonstrated that school rating and publication of data can lead to greater levels of segregation and stratification (Glazerman, 1998; Hasan & Kumar, 2018). Other scholars have also demonstrated that white parents often form their beliefs about school quality based on status

ideologies or assumptions about reputation tied to racial demographics and word-of-mouth recommendations from their social networks rather than by using so-called “objective” measures of school quality (Holme, 2002; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008, Lareau, 2014).

Parkwood is an interesting and unique site through which to explore these questions of school choice and race-based status ideologies. While school outcome measures such as test scores and graduation rates often reveal different outcomes for students of different racial groups, which white and Asian students commonly scoring higher on performance measures than black and Latinx students, there is very little difference in test scores and graduation rates across racial groups in Parkwood- all subgroups have high proficiency rates, particularly when compared to state averages. Table 2 below highlights a sample of selected state test proficiency rates and the graduation rate by racial subgroup in Parkwood.

Table 2. Academic Achievement Data by Race in Parkwood Secondary Schools, 2016-2017

| | HS English % Proficient | Algebra II % Proficient | Social Studies % Proficient | Graduation Rate |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Black | 94% | 92% | 96% | 94% |
| White | 95% | 93% | 96% | 94% |
| Hispanic | 93% | 90% | 93% | 94% |
| Asian | 95% | 95% | 93% | 96% |

Furthermore, despite the fact that many white parents use the district’s transfer policy to exit Riverside to send their children to Easthaven or Westview, which, as I discuss in Chapter Five, is often defended by arguments about quality differences across the schools, the three secondary school options in Parkwood measure similarly on common “school quality” indicators. Table 3 below details a sample of such indicators (including suspension rates, ELA and Math test proficiency rates, and graduation rates) across the schools for the 2016-2017 school year.

Table 3. Selected Parkwood Secondary School Data, 2016-2017

| | Suspension Rate | Grade 7 ELA % Proficient | Grade 7 Math % Proficient | Graduation Rate |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Riverside | 4% | 43% | 37% | 95% |
| Easthaven | 4% | 45% | 32% | 95% |
| Westview | 2% | 46% | 39% | 95% |

While Westview has the lowest suspension rate of the three schools at 2 percent, Riverside and Easthaven, which receives the majority of the transfer students from Riverside each have a suspension rate of 4 percent. When looking at a snapshot of student proficiency rates on 7th grade state tests, there is very little variation across schools, with Westview having a slightly higher percentage of students deemed proficient on both ELA and math tests than the other two schools. Easthaven has slightly higher percentage of students proficient on ELA exams than Riverside, while Riverside has a higher percentage of proficiency than Easthaven in math. The graduation rates across the three schools are identical. All of the schools rank substantially higher than the state average on measures of proficiency and graduation rates. The district high schools are regularly ranked on U.S. News and World Report measures of the best schools in America, with Riverside and Westview often ranking higher than Easthaven. Thus, according to these “objective” measures of school quality, all secondary schools in Parkwood are considered to be high achieving, and the differences across schools are minor.

Data Collection

I designed my data collection strategy with the purpose of developing an understanding of how white parents in Parkwood made sense of demographic change and the extent to and mechanisms by which racial power dynamics existed in Parkwood schools in this context. With a goal of obtaining a deep, rich understanding of the meaning making, ideologies, and actions of

white parents related to race and demographic change in relation to the broader context, ideologies, power dynamics, and political environment in the district, I conducted online and in-person observations in the community and in-depth interviews with a sample of parents, school leaders, and a number of community members.

Interviews.

My primary source of data for this study consisted of in-depth interviews, which allowed me to obtain rich and detailed data on the deep-seated understandings, attitudes, and emotions that my participants expressed- which I could not likely obtain through observations alone (Merriam, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). According to Patton (2002), “We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions...we cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective.” (p.340-341) Furthermore, in-depth interviews are particularly useful in facilitating discussions of sensitive issues around race and ethnicity that are central to my study (Johnson & Shapiro, 2003).

I conducted interviews primarily with white parents in Parkwood, as well as with a sample of parents of color in order to identify any similarities or differences across parents from different racial backgrounds. In addition, I conducted a number of interviews with district leaders (principals, school board members) and community members. Interview participants were selected using a purposeful sampling method. This type of sampling is appropriate in qualitative research that aims to answer questions of *what* is occurring, *why* it occurs, and *what the implications* of the occurrences are as opposed to the larger, random samples that are often used in quantitative research to answer questions of “how much” or “how often” something occurs

(Honigmann, 1982, p.84; Merriam, 2016). According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling is useful to study information-rich cases that can provide deep, in-depth knowledge about the specific areas of interest in the study.

I recruited initial parent participants in person at parent meetings, as well as through connections with teachers and administrators in the Parkwood district. During several of the parent meetings that I attended at Riverside, I was given the opportunity to introduce my project to parents in attendance, and passed around a sign-up sheet for those interested in participating in interviews. Later in the data collection process, I also conducted snowball sampling to connect with additional parents through my established contacts.

Each interview was semi-structured in nature. I used interview protocols (See Appendix A for parent and district leader interview protocols) to guide the discussion, but the questions and structure of the interview were flexible to allow for changes in the questions that I asked and the order and phrasing of the questions in response to the flow of the conversation (Merriam, 2016). The main questions in my protocol were open-ended, aimed at understanding the respondents experiences, perspectives, and attitudes related to Parkwood schools, demographic change, and racial dynamics in the community. The open-ended nature of these questions allowed the respondents to interpret them and respond in their own unique ways, guided by their individual experiences and understandings. I used a responsive interviewing style, which helped to build a sense of trust between the respondent and myself and allowed for protocol questions to evolve, and new questions to be created based on previous responses. In some cases, I asked follow-up questions or requested clarity to get more detailed and specific responses as needed. Following each interview, I recorded field notes of my observations and reflections to describe the physical

environment, tone of the conversation, key topics that related to my areas of interests, and ideas for revisions to the protocol or topics in need of further exploration.

The majority of the interviews in the study were conducted in-person, in a location of the participant's choosing. Most parents chose to meet at a public place in their neighborhood- such as a restaurant or coffee shop, while others chose to meet in their homes. All interviews with district and school leaders were conducted during the school week, in district buildings. In the later stages of my data collection, I gave parents who I had previously met in-person the option to participate in interviews over the phone.

Prior to beginning each interview, I briefly described my study, informed the participants of their rights, and asked permission to record the interview. All participants consented to recording, with the exception of one parent. Each interview recording was then transcribed fully, accurately, and verbatim (Rubin & Rubin, 2013), either by myself or through an online transcription service, Rev. I also recorded field notes before, during, and after each interview to include descriptions of the locations and interviewees, and to capture my initial reactions and impressions about the interview content and the respondent's tone, emotions, and responses that might not come across in written transcripts. For interviews that I transcribed myself, I sometimes added notes as I recalled additional impressions or recognized interesting patterns in respondents' speech. All transcripts were uploaded to Nvivo, the data analysis software I used to code interview and observation data.

Prior study interviews.

The impetus for this dissertation topic grew out of my work on a larger, multi-researcher study on suburban housing, demographic change, and school segregation in the county where Parkwood is located. As part of this study, our research team conducted a multi-site analysis of

several school districts in the area that were experiencing rapid changes in their student populations, including Parkwood. My participation in this project and time spent conducting this research in Parkwood and other nearby communities helped me to develop an understanding of the policies, practices, culture, and challenges present in suburban districts that were experiencing demographic change. This research also helped lead me to identify Parkwood as a ideal site for this case study in need of further research on the responses of white community members and school officials to shifting racial demographics.

Our team conducted a total of 64 interviews (including some follow-ups) in Parkwood alone for this project. We interviewed local school board members (n=3), administrators at the district and school levels (n=9), the majority of teachers and counselors in Riverside Middle School (n=36), parents and community members (n=6) and real estate agents (n=2). The team members collecting these data across the district included: Amy Stuart Wells (PI), Kathryn Hill, myself, Alana Miles, Terrenda White, Miya Warner, and Jacquelyn Duran. In addition to conducting a number of these interviews myself, either alone or with another member of the research team, I was also heavily involved in post-interview discussions and the data analysis process for the project, which helped me develop a broader understanding of the context of Parkwood than I might have gained through reading and analyzing interview transcripts alone.

In the analysis for this dissertation, I include a small subset of the interview transcripts from this earlier study in my overall analysis. Further details on these interviews are provided in the following section on interview participants. When possible, I aimed to conduct at least one additional interview with each participant from the prior study as part of my official data collection for this dissertation. I coded all of the protocols from this earlier study separately from the team data analysis, according to my project coding scheme.

Interview participants.

I focused much of my data collection efforts on conducting interviews with white parents in the district, and particularly those whose children attended Riverside Middle and High schools. To provide a counter-narrative to those of white parents, I also conducted interviews with parents of color in Riverside in order to identify similarities and differences in meaning making across parents. In addition, I interviewed school and district-level leadership with the goal of understanding institutional approaches and perspectives related to district policies and practices around race. I conducted a total of 16 interviews with white parents, 10 interviews with parents of color, and 6 interviews with school leaders and administrators.

The total number of interviews included in my analysis is 49, which includes a number of follow-up interviews. Of these, 33 interviews were with conducted with Parkwood parents and/or community members and 16 were conducted with school or district leaders. Five of the parent/resident interviews and nine of the leader interviews were conducted as part of the earlier study discussed above. My sample includes 16 white Parkwood parents, eight black parents, one Latina parent and one South Asian parent. The district and school leaders in my sample were all white, with the exception of one black school board member. Table 4 below details the list of participants, their pseudonym, role (e.g. parent; principal), affiliation (e.g. district or school), and their racial identity, as well as an identification of which interviews were conducted as part of my main data collection or were part of the earlier study.

Table 4. Interview Inventory and Characteristics of Participants

| Name ¹ | Role (at time of interview) | Affiliation | Race |
|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Parents and Community Members</i> | | | |
| Carrie | Parent | Easthaven High | white |
| Chris | Parent | Riverside Middle | white |
| Claire | Parent | Westview Middle | white |
| Cynthia | Parent | Riverside Middle+High | black |
| Cynthia (follow-up) | Parent | Riverside Middle+High | black |
| Daniel* | Long-time resident/ parent of preschool child | Parkwood | white |
| Daniel | Long-time resident/ parent of preschool child | Parkwood | white |
| Dianne | Parent | Westview Middle | white |
| Elena | Parent | Riverside Middle | Latina |
| Elizabeth | Parent | Easthaven Middle | white |
| Gerald | Parent | Riverside Middle | black |
| Gloria* | Parent | Riverside High | black |
| Jasmine | Parent | Riverside Middle | black/white biracial |
| Jennifer | Parent | Easthaven Middle+High | white |
| Katie | Parent | Riverside Middle | white |
| Kenton | Parent | Briarwood Elementary | black |
| Lisa* | Resident; Real Estate Agent | Parkwood | white |
| Lydia | Parent | Briarwood Elementary | white |
| Melinda | Parent | Riverside Middle | South Asian |
| Michael | Parent | Easthaven Middle | black |
| Nancy | Parent | Riverside Middle | white |
| Nina | Parent | Riverside Middle+High | white |
| Olivia | Parent | Riverside Middle | black |
| Sandra* | Long-time resident | Parkwood | white |
| Shelly | Parent | Riverside Middle | white |
| Stephanie* | Parent | Riverside Middle | white |
| Stephanie | Parent | Riverside Middle | white |
| Stephanie (follow-up) | Parent | Riverside Middle | white |
| Susan | Parent | Riverside Middle | white |
| Sylvia | Parent | Riverside Middle | black |
| Theresa | Parent | Riverside Middle | white |
| Tim | Parent | Riverside Middle+High | white |

¹ Pseudonyms; * Interview from previous study

| <i>District and School Leaders</i> | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-------|
| Dr. Stevens* | Superintendent | Parkwood District | white |
| Dr. Danielson* | Assistant Superintendent | Parkwood District | white |
| Dr. Danielson* | Superintendent | Parkwood District | white |
| Mr. Davis* | Assistant Principal | Riverside Middle | white |
| Mr. Davis | Principal | Riverside Middle | white |
| Mr. Davis | Principal | Riverside Middle | white |
| Mr. DeLuca* | Residency Officer | Parkwood District | white |
| Mr. DeLuca* (follow-up) | Residency Officer | Parkwood District | white |
| Mr. Gallo* | Principal | Riverside Middle | white |
| Mr. Gallo* (follow-up) | Principal | Riverside Middle | white |
| Mr. Gallo | Principal | Riverside Middle | white |
| Mr. Gallo (follow-up) | Principal | Riverside Middle | white |
| Mr. Palermo* | Principal | Riverside High | white |
| Mr. Moretti | School Board Member | Parkwood District | white |
| Mr. Pierce | School Board Member | Parkwood District | black |
| Ms. Clark | School Board Member | Parkwood District | white |

Observations.

In-person and online observations were a critical part of my data collection strategy for studying how whiteness operates within the context of racist structures and how white stakeholders respond to demographic change in ideological and institutional ways. Observations, which involve studying the behaviors of actors within and in relation to their social environment as it unfolds, provide the research with important insight into “what people do rather than what they say they do.” (Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2017, p.1061)

In this study of the sense-making and actions of whites in relation to racial ideologies and systems of stratification, observing the relationship between stated beliefs and behaviors was a key way in which I could explore the iterative relationships between broad structures of racism and the individual meaning making and actions that operated within them. More specifically, observations shed light on “problems inherent in self-reported accounts...[and] insights not

accessible from other data collection methods, such as structures, processes, and other behaviors” that interview participants may be unaware of, or decline or neglect to address (Morgan et.al., 2017, p.1060). In the context of my study, these observations revealed contradictions inherent in what white people say about race in our “post-racial” society, and how they act in ways that often reproduce structures of inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Roda & Wells, 2013).

In-person observations.

I conducted observations at a number of district and school meetings and events that were held for parents in Parkwood throughout the school year. I attended a total of 21 meetings- five of these were district-wide meetings, 12 were held specifically for parents of Riverside students, and four were held at elementary schools in Parkwood for parents who were considering where to send their children for middle and high school.

The district-wide meetings were open to the public and were all held in the cafeteria of Riverside middle school. Two of these were meetings of the district Board of Education, one was a legislative breakfast focused on the local schools, and two were district-wide meetings of the special committee that was convened to review the intra-district transfer policy. The two other district-wide meetings were public convenings of the committee assigned to evaluate the intra-district transfer policy.

During my period of data collection, I also regularly attended monthly meetings that were held by the Riverside middle and high school principals, during which current parents discuss a number of factors of concern to the school including curriculum, testing, enrollment, and the transfer policy. Attending and observing these meetings not only provided me with an understanding of parents’ perspectives and concerns within the school, but also allowed me to

develop contacts and connections with parents at the school, some of who agreed to participate in interviews. I was able to attend these meetings at the invitation of the Riverside principals.

Each year, all elementary schools in the Parkwood district host meetings during which representatives from each of the three secondary schools in the district give presentations and answer questions for prospective parents. I attended four of these meetings, which are held in the winter before the transfer process begins, in order to gain a better understanding of parents' opinions and concerns about the three different schools, particularly as it relates to racial/ethnic composition and its connection to the schools' reputations.

I attended two meetings at Briarwood elementary school, one at Pinecrest elementary, and one at Oakdale elementary. Briarwood and Pinecrest elementaries feed entirely into Riverside, while Oakdale students are assigned either to Riverside or Easthaven based on their residence. Based on my interviews, I learned that nearly all white students at Oakdale who are assigned to Riverside use the transfer policy to attend Easthaven, as do a substantial number of white students (and, to a lesser extent, students of color) who attend Briarwood. Pinecrest students, who are predominantly of color, less commonly use the transfer policy and most opt to attend Riverside, where they are assigned.

In the initial stages of data collection, my observations involved very little participation and discussion with the research subjects and would thus be classified as "non-participatory" or "passive participation" (Spradley, 1980). Over time, I built relationships with a number of parents who regularly attended these meetings, and became, for a period of time, just another member of the community at the school. Thus, over time, my status in these observations went from that of an outsider, to more of an insider and moderate participant role (Spradley, 1980). As parents got to know me better, I was increasingly included and involved in casual conversations,

which allowed me access to more natural and open discussions about the changes in the schools and the community.

During meetings in which I was a non-participant or passive participant, I sat alone and openly took notes about the topics being discussed and comments raised by those in attendance. As I became more connected to parents in Riverside in particular, I would regularly sit with them during meetings. In this context, I refrained from taken notes as openly as in prior meetings to avoid making the parents uncomfortable. Instead, I would jot quick notes as needed and record in-depth field notes immediately after the meetings. Field notes served as my method for recording issues discussed, notes about statements made by attendees, general observations about the environment and who was in attendance, and my initial reactions and analyses of what had occurred. I uploaded these notes to Nvivo for systematic analysis, discussed further in the next section.

Online observations.

Finally, I conducted qualitative observations and content analysis of online Facebook discussions (Awan, 2016) among parents and residents in the district that I observed through daily observations over the course of my data collection process. I followed two public Facebook pages; one for district parents and one for all residents of the local community, on which residents regularly posted thoughts, articles, and questions, sometimes related to changing demographics and school policies. Facebook proved to be a surprising and illuminating resource for understanding how residents in the community as a whole made sense of and talked about race in Parkwood and the local public schools. In these virtual public spaces, I heard from a wider range of individuals than the sample I was able to access for in-depth interviews, and was also able to learn more about how conversations about school quality and racial demographics

played out across the district, which voices were dominant, and what sorts of conflicts and/or disagreements arose.

I developed my online data collection methods in consultation with the Teachers College IRB office. In order to focus the scope and to address concerns of researcher bias, I selected three Facebook conversations as samples for analysis that were relevant to my research questions. One such conversation followed a post from a parent on the public Parkwood parent page. The other two conversations occurred in response to an article by a local newspaper that had been posted on the community page.

I began by transcribing each comment, recording the observable demographic characteristics of each commenter to attach to their post. I also recorded notes on how I was able to obtain the relevant demographic data- whether it was noted in the comment or another post, was part of the poster's public profile, or I was aware because I had previously met and/or interviewed the commenter. When I was unable to determine characteristics conclusively (particularly about the commenter's racial identity), I noted this as well. I also eliminated comments from individuals if I could not verify that they lived or had previously lived in the community. The transcribed comments and related notes were uploaded to Nvivo for analysis.

Data Analysis

My approach to data analysis was “ongoing and iterative” (Galletta, 2013, p.119). It was ongoing in that it began during data collection and continued throughout the dissertation writing stage (Galletta, 2013), and was iterative in that identification of themes required me to engage in a multi-step coding process in which I revisited relevant literature, theory and my data repeatedly as needed to identify and refine my findings (Luker, 2008).

My preliminary data analysis strategies, coinciding with the data collection phase, consisted of transcribing and reading interview transcripts; writing, typing up and reviewing field notes from interviews and in-person observations, reading and transcribing Facebook discussion transcripts, and writing memos to summarize first impressions and general themes that I identified across data sources. This preliminary analysis helped to inform future observations and interviews and the revision of protocol questions when needed. In this way, the data that I obtained informed the process of data collection and allowed me to strengthen my questions to gain richer data in subsequent interviews and observations.

My next phase of data analysis involved the construction of and coding on general themes or “categories” in interview and observation data, using Nvivo data analysis software (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). These categories were initially descriptive rather than analytic in nature, and were tentative- that is, they were reshaped and refined as needed depending on the extent to which they held across multiple sources of data (Merriam, 2016). After coding all of my data- including interview transcripts, field notes, and online discussion transcripts according to these descriptive categories, I returned to memoing in order to identify similarities, differences, consistencies and contradictions across modes and sources, and begin to construct hypotheses. This provided an opportunity for reflection and deeper analysis to guide construction of my analytical themes and increase my confidence in the credibility of my findings (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017).

I then engaged in a second round of coding according to these analytical themes. During this round, I also made an effort to identify any racialized language, narratives, cues, and especially coded language that can serve to obscure the realities of racial attitudes and power dynamics (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Pollock, 2004; Kenny, 2000; Gallagher, 2000) in order to “make

the ‘invisible’ visible” (Sue, 2004). During the analysis process, I triangulated my data from interviews, in-person observations, and online observations in order to recognize and clarify relevant themes that reappeared and were robust across sources (Yin, 2009; Merriam, 2016).

Ethics and Protection of Research Participants

I followed careful guidelines established by the Teachers College Internal Review Board in order to protect my participants from any ethical concerns. In order to protect the confidentiality of my research participants, I used pseudonyms to refer to the community and the participants throughout my writing. I also took steps to disguise potentially identifiable information by limiting the extent to which I shared certain details and descriptors about the individuals, school, district, and community who were the subjects of my research. When describing online observation data, I decided not to include direct quotes of more than three words so as to avoid the potential for searching and identifying the names of people or locations.

When conducting observations in non-public settings, such as the Saturday parents meetings held at Riverside, I introduced myself to the meeting attendees as a researcher, described my study, and informed them that I was there to observe and take notes. Prior to beginning each interview, I informed each participant of their rights, briefly described the goals of my study, and ask them to sign a consent form for participation. I then requested their permission to continue with the interview and to use a tape recorder before beginning the interview. I stored audio files, transcripts, field notes and all additional identifying information on a password-protected folder on my computer.

Studying Race and Whiteness in the Era of Colorblindness

As a researcher, I was interested in understanding not only the outcomes of structural racism, but also the mechanisms through which it operates and is perpetuated. Critical whiteness

studies recognizes the challenges associated with studying whiteness in a sociopolitical context that does not recognize that whiteness and white supremacy exist and are problems that needs to be addressed (Frankenberg, 2004). Thus, taking a critical research approach, I believe that interrogating Whiteness and the ideological, behavioral, and institutional ways in which it is upheld or interrupted is essential to dismantling white supremacy.

Studying Whiteness and white privilege can pose particular challenges to researchers in the current era of racial discourse, in which common-sense narratives of color-blindness has led many whites to claim that they are beyond seeing and thinking about race, and that Whiteness does not qualify as “having race” (Lewis, 2004). My methodological approach, therefore aims to examine the attitudes and identities of whites with attention to the broader context of collective racial ideologies and racist social structures. As Lewis (2004) argues,

[R]esearch on whiteness must not fall prey to focusing on whites only when they are claiming white identities most loudly or explicitly. The importance of studying the role of whites as racial actors cannot be measured by the level of whites’ felt racial identities or explicitly felt groupness but rather stems from their racialized social location and their status within the racial hierarchy (p.624)

It was important in my research, then, to be aware of how covert references to race could be expressed through colorblind language (Lewis, 2001; 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2018) as well as how the actions of whites were in line with or in contradiction to their stated beliefs (Roda & Wells, 2013). I drew in part on Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s (2018) discussion of the “central frames of colorblind racism” to inform my analysis of the subtle ways that white participants talked about race and expressed racist beliefs and ideologies. As discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, he identifies four themes common in the frames of color-blind racism that “operate as cul-de-sacs because after people filter information through them, they explain racial phenomena following a predictable route.” (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p.54) The four frames, abstract liberalism,

naturalization, cultural racism and minimization of racism, are commonly used by whites in this “post-racial,” era and can serve to reinforce racial domination in hidden ways that justify and obscure systematic discrimination and inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

In social science research, it is critical that the position of the researcher be examined, documented, and accounted for throughout the research process (Frankenberg, 2004). As explained by Knight, Bentley, Norton, & Dixon, (2004), “reflexivity has been used to analyze the ways in which the researcher’s fluid positionality(ies) or multiple social locations, including class, gender, race, and professional expertise, affect the processes of research.” (p.392). It was important throughout the research process, therefore, to consistently be aware of my own positionality and perspectives, which of course influenced my interest in and approach to this topic. I made every effort to minimize the extent to which my own beliefs and perspectives influenced the way that I conducted interviews and reacted to what was said. I was also careful when analyzing data to ensure that I was open to any story that the data told, regardless of whether it was in line with my expectations and beliefs. By acknowledging my own social role, reflecting on this throughout the project, and expressing that in my written conclusions, I am to address concerns over the potential threat to validity that my own position and bias may pose.

My own racial identity, experiences, and perspectives were integral to my interest in this topic, my approaches to constructing the research questions, theoretical framework methodology, the interactions that I had with participants, and my analysis of the data. As a white woman who has studied race and racial inequality for many years and grew up attending desegregated public schools, I am interested in understanding and dismantling racist structures, white supremacy, and barriers to creating more inclusive and equitable spaces in which whites and people of color can

learn, grown, and connect with one another in meaningful ways. It is with this ideal in mind that I chose to study a racially changing community in hopes of understanding how structures of racism may be interrupted or are reproduced.

My racial privilege has also shielded me from the realities of racism in America in many ways. Knowing this, I made efforts throughout the research process to read literature and theory from critical scholars of color in particular who have written about the ways that racism and whiteness operate in society. I also aimed to critically analyze and interrupt my own meaning making during the research project that could serve to obscure, minimize, or inaccurately interpret instances of racism that occurred in Parkwood.

The reflexivity process throughout this research involved ongoing reflection in field notes and journals. I spent a great deal of time thinking, recording my reflections, reading literature and theory, and revisiting my data in an iterative process (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). I aimed to examine the extent to which the ways my participants made sense of and responded to racial demographic change in their suburban community were consistent with or in contrast with recent theoretical and empirical work on whiteness, with the goal of separating the data and analysis from my own biases and value judgments.

Insider/outsider status.

As a white woman, I recognize the distinct privilege that I had in having white study participants speak openly with me about their beliefs and feelings about race. Sharing the racial background of many of my participants gave me access as a racial insider (Deliofsky, 2017). I believe that my white respondents were more candid with me about their racial attitudes than they likely would have been with a researcher who presented as a person of color, because they made assumptions about how I would interpret their statements as a fellow white person

(Hurtado and Stewart, 2004). I believe that they felt a sense of comfort and safety with me that they would not be “seen” as holding and acting on racial bias (Jensen, 2005).

At the same time, I was also an outsider in Parkwood in a number of ways. First, I was not from the community, and was living in another area which is seen as culturally disconnected and more politically liberal than Parkwood. I was also attending an ivy-league university that has a reputation for progressive political activism. I am also younger than many of my participants, a characteristic that is also associated with having more racially and politically progressive ideals. As many of the white residents that I interviewed identified as political conservatives, I believe that my white respondents were likely somewhat guarded about some topics related to race and politics, for fear of being labeled “racist.” In this way, I was likely perceived as somewhat of a cultural-political outsider, and someone who might be critical of their perspectives.

Challenges of access and limitations of studying whiteness.

The study of whiteness and racism in Parkwood posed a number of challenges to access given the taboo nature of the topic in the current social context. As I moved through my research, awareness of racial tensions in the U.S. began to heighten amid protests against police violence and the election of Donald Trump. In Parkwood, the debate regarding the intra-district transfer policy that emerged towards the end of my data collection also led to flared tensions around racism in the community.

In this context, I noticed that it became more difficult to gain access to the schools themselves or to get responses from white parents in particular who I contacted for interviews. The vast majority of my emails and calls during the time period following Trump’s inauguration and the convening of the transfer policy advisor committee were ignored, including those that were made to previous interview participants. As a result, I spoke mostly with parents of color in

the later stages of my study. I also noticed that in the few conversations I was able to have with white parents during this time, participants were more likely to minimize instances of racism and avoid discussing it altogether.

Conclusion: A Parkwood Case Study

Given the context of Parkwood and my unique theoretical approach, this study can inform our understanding of how whites maintain power in various forms in a context in which this power might logically be threatened as a result of demographic changes and socioeconomic characteristics of the population. The multi-modal qualitative case study design that I developed to examine responses of white parents and institutions to demographic change in Parkwood and the extent to which racial power dynamics and inequalities existed in this context allowed me to capture the complex and iterative relationship between the individual beliefs, meaning making and actions of whites and the broader social structures that they operated within and influenced through their actions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Whiteness and Status in Parkwood and its Schools

On one of my first trips to Parkwood, I attended a PTA meeting at Briarwood Elementary, one of the schools in the district that feeds directly into Riverside middle school. While every student who attended this school was assigned to attend Riverside, Mr. Gallo, the Riverside middle school principal, noted that a significant number of students had utilized the district's transfer policy to attend Easthaven instead. Since he became principal three years earlier, Mr. Gallo said that more than half of the white children as well as a much smaller, but still notable number of Asian and black students assigned to Riverside had transferred to Easthaven.

At this Briarwood Elementary PTA meeting, Mr. Gallo had come to share information about Riverside and to introduce himself to prospective parents. Mr. Gallo saw these meetings as an important opportunity to highlight the quality of education available at Riverside and to convince parents to choose their assigned school. He spoke about the accomplishments of the school, shared photos, and presented data on test scores and high school graduation rates, all of which were very similar to those of Easthaven and Westview. He also shared a pie chart of the racial demographics of the school, touting the racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of the student body as a strength of the school community. A number of current Riverside parents, most of whom were white, whose children had attended Briarwood were also in attendance as a show of support to Mr. Gallo, and to share their own perspectives on the school. As Mr. Gallo spoke, the room was generally quiet, aside from a short question and answer period following his

presentation- many Briarwood parents appeared uninterested, including a few who left before he was finished.

As I was leaving the meeting, I walked to the parking lot beside a white woman named Lydia, who was a parent of a fifth grader at Briarwood Elementary and was deciding where to send her child for middle school. She agreed to speak with me for a few moments to share her thoughts about the different schools and the choice process. She told me that she had been impressed and pleasantly surprised by the data and information about Riverside that Mr. Gallo had shared, but told me just before she had to leave that she was still hesitant to send her son there. She was likely to choose Easthaven instead. “You know,” she told me, “He [Mr. Gallo] really shouldn’t have put up that information about the students’ race. The white percentage is so small. It doesn’t look good for them.”

Lydia’s comment stayed with me as I continued my work in the Parkwood school district, and as I would come to understand, her meaning making about race and school quality would be typical of the attitudes and understandings of many white parents in the district that were identified in later interviews. I thought about how simple and matter-of-fact her statement had been- in fact, it was a bit jarring to hear after she had been talking so positively about Mr. Gallo’s presentation just before. I reflected on how, for her, recognizing the high proportion of students of color, and small proportion of white students in the school was directly connected to a negative perception of the school overall. In other words, the extent to which Riverside was a desirable school option for her child was so tied to the racial demographics of the student body that it essentially made the other parts of Mr. Gallo’s discussion- those that highlighted the strengths of Riverside- irrelevant in her school choice decision-making. I quickly learned that this was common among white parents as well as community members in Parkwood- that race

was intrinsically tied to notions of quality, status, and desirability of schools and the community as a whole.

I begin the findings portion of my dissertation by delving deeply into a discussion of the racialized meaning making of white residents living in Parkwood. I learned through my analysis that the attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies of white parents in relation to race and the local schools were instrumental in informing their behavior and the institutional policies and practices in the district that led to ongoing inequality in power and privilege across racial lines. The data presented in this chapter point to many examples of how, for many current and former white residents of Parkwood, the perceived status of the community and schools was deeply associated with the race of those who occupied the space, regardless of objective, tangible characteristics. More specifically, ideas about race and status were tied to perceptions about the “goodness” of people- their behavior, values, work ethic, morality; related to the concept of status ideologies and what Weber (1978) called the “social estimation of honor.” I also demonstrate in this chapter the ways in which perceptions about race were often expressed through the use of coded, race-neutral language (Bonilla-Silva, 2018) and the construction of false narratives to justify negative perceptions of the community and schools tied to race that would eventually take root and become accepted as “truth.”

Finally, I present data from a small, but strong contingent of white parents who offered a counter-narrative because they did not buy into the rumors about the decline in status of the community and schools, particularly Riverside, which was seen as lower-status than Easthaven and Westview. However, notions of status and reputation, particularly tied to whiteness and “goodness,” were still present, and weighed heavily on the minds of these parents as they negotiated tensions between their place as white parents who were, at the same time,

beneficiaries of white privilege and embedded in broader systems of white supremacy. These parents embodied interesting contradictions as, on the surface, they recognized and described flaws in the dominant white narratives that associated the district and schools with lower quality and status in the midst of demographic changes, but were still influenced by and perpetuated notions of whiteness and status. I also discuss initial findings that highlight how these white Riverside parents embodied understandings of themselves as “colorblind” and “post-racial” which, as I demonstrate in Chapters Six and Seven, were used to justify the maintenance of white privilege and power and the marginalization of students of color within the Riverside building and the district overall.

When the Status of a Community is About Who Lives There

Parkwood is a quintessential middle-class Northeastern suburban community. There is a quaint downtown area with one main street, populated mostly with locally owned shops and restaurants. The outskirts of the town include a commercial area with a shopping mall and large chain stores, but the core of the community is mostly residential, with neighborhood blocks flanked by unassuming but well-maintained cape and bungalow-style homes. The schools are nestled in between homes in a way that makes them feel seamlessly integrated into the neighborhood. It is not uncommon to see residents walking their dogs, children playing in their yards, and neighbors catching up with one another when picking up their morning coffee. As a non-resident, the community felt very close-knit, quiet, peaceful, and almost old-fashioned- quite a contrast to the bustling city just miles away. It became clear to me early on in my data collection that living in Parkwood is about more than an address- it was about a way of life.

In my conversations with each of my interviewees, one of the first things I wanted to understand was why they chose to live in Parkwood, and how their decision to live there was tied

to racial demographics and the reputations of the local public schools. While the residents I spoke to varied in terms of how long they had lived there- a small number were born there or nearby, some had lived there for well over a decade, and some had moved in the last few years- the initial answers were similar for the majority of respondents, across racial lines. Most of the residents of all racial/ethnic backgrounds that I interviewed had first moved to Parkwood from the nearby city, in search of better schools and a quieter community, while still living close enough to access urban jobs and amenities. They consistently talked about wanting to give their children a better life and access to better schools. Thus, there was something about this place, its suburban lifestyle and the associated status and reputation that signaled to them that they were moving up in the world and providing better opportunities for their children.

However, white residents and residents of color that I interviewed had very different responses when describing their perceptions of Parkwood today. Parkwood is still a solidly middle-class community, home to hard-working teachers, police officers, and business people. Its streets are still peaceful and quiet, aside from the sound of children playing or dogs barking from time to time. The schools are still considered to be “high achieving” based on common notions of academic “success” with state test scores that are well above the state average and over 95 percent of students graduating from high school. Riverside and Westview are both nationally ranked by *U.S. News and World Report*, and most children in the district go on to attend four-year colleges and universities. There is virtually no racial “achievement gap,” and there is little difference in income and education levels across racial lines, in fact, white residents have lower levels of income and education than residents of color. But for some white residents, living in and attending schools in Parkwood is no longer considered to be as desirable as it once was. Racially and ethnically, Parkwood is not the same community that it was 50, 30, or even 10

years ago, and I learned from my interviews with parents and school leaders that the demographic changes had led to a shift in dominant perceptions of status and quality of the community and its schools, particularly amongst white residents.

It was clear among many in the white community that the decline in the white proportion of the population in Parkwood brought with it a decline in the status and reputation of the community. While not all white residents agreed that the decline in status reflected an *actual* decline in quality of life, all who I spoke to agreed that the *perception* of the community as a whole had changed for the worse as more residents of color moved in. Since Parkwood was never an *ethnically* homogenous community (it was historically home to a mix of white Italian, Irish, and Jewish residents), this was clearly a reaction to the changing *racial* makeup of the neighborhoods.

These notions of demographic changes in Parkwood tied to a decline in the community were expressed openly and often by white commenters in Facebook posts on the public community pages. In fact, I came across posts from some of these former residents who still frequented the comments sections to let their ideas about the change in the community be known. One thread that was particularly illuminating emerged in response to a news article about how the Parkwood school district was considering establishing school holidays around a significant Muslim holiday, Eid, in order to accommodate and respect the large and growing population of Muslim students. While the school board and many parents in the community were generally supportive of this, for some current and former residents, it was representative of a stark change in the identity of the community. One “leaver” proclaimed in the comments thread that he was “glad he left” and claimed that Parkwood is “slipping and sliding into a third world shit hole.” Another wrote simply, “there goes the neighborhood.”

These Facebook posts about the decline of the Parkwood community, in reaction to the possibility that the local schools would have one day off of school so that a substantial portion of its students could celebrate one of their most important religious holidays, highlight the extent to which Parkwood's identity, and status, was tied in the minds of many, to who lived there. For them, the idea of honoring the holidays of Muslim students was enough to determine that the community had gone downhill, and was no longer desirable.

Many of the residents I spoke to who still lived in Parkwood were well aware of the changes in the perceived status of the community. Michael, a black parent who had lived in Parkwood for about ten years, told me plainly, "there were folks who thought that the demographic changes were indication that the community was on a slow decline, and they fought that." Susan, a white woman who was a life-long resident of Parkwood, was still in touch with many of her former classmates who no longer lived in the community, and now view it as an undesirable place to live. She said, "all my old friends are from here and they're all like, 'How could you still live there? You still want to live in that town? There's so many other people there.'"

These perceptions of Parkwood were strong, and exemplified Harris's (1993) notion of reputational and status functions of whiteness as property in that the identification of Parkwood as a "nonwhite" community has diminished its status and reputation (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). At the same time, residents who noted the decline in the community would often express feelings of loss for the community that they once knew. One of my interviewees, Daniel, a white man who had lived in Parkwood his whole life, discussed how current and past residents of Parkwood would often cling to nostalgic ideas of what the community used to be,

You constantly see remarks like, 'oh [Parkwood] was such a great community. I really wish it was the way it was back then you know'... They continue to place this definition

on [Parkwood], that it needs to be the community it was in the 60's and the 50's, you know this wonderful suburban, low density, working class community. Instead of looking at it as something that grows and changes and is dynamic and fluid, they're stuck in this mentality.

Oftentimes, such feelings of loss and nostalgia were intertwined with statements about the decline in Parkwood as older Parkwood residents talked about the changing community, lamenting what it once was, and expressing frustration at feeling as though their cultures were no longer adequately represented in the community. On the same thread discussed above about the school district considering recognizing a major Muslim holiday on the school calendar, the majority of the comments on Facebook were by current or former residents who did not approve. Numerous white residents commented that if the district decides to recognize this holiday, they should also allow students to take the day off for St. Patrick's Day and Ash Wednesday, which would only be fair to Catholic students.

As the conversation shifted to the downtown area that had seen some changes in recent years, one resident talked disparagingly about the newer businesses that had popped up to serve the new community members, saying that the main street in the downtown areas now looks like "little Islamabad." He expressed disgust at the businesses and people he saw populating the block more recently, as he recalled the Italian bakery and ravioli shop that used to be on the same street.

Another resident talked about how she owned a florist business on the main street in the community, and had lived in Parkwood for over a decade. She wrote about feeling sad because, in her mind, Parkwood no longer felt like the community that she once knew. She went on to say that when "we" become the minority in "our own country," that is a problem. She described her daughter's class when she was in sixth grade, and said that she was one of only two "Americans"

in her class. She expressed her dissatisfaction at the possibility of schools closing for Muslim holidays, saying that the community does too much to cater to everyone “but our own.” Finally, she stated that her business was suffering and blamed the Halal meat market down the street as well as a Pakistani gift shop that also sold flowers, for her loss of business. Her post had several likes and numerous comments from other residents expressing their agreement and sympathy.

This woman’s comments highlighted trends that I saw throughout my time in Parkwood. Even among some residents who were still living in the community, there was an underlying sense that something had been lost- or in some cases, taken- along with the loss of white residents and businesses. For them, this was described as a loss of community and cohesion, which inextricably linked to a loss of whiteness. Like the woman mentioned above, multiple people that I interviewed equated the meaning of “American” with whiteness, and the absence of whiteness or lack of assimilation into whiteness was associated with a lack of American values and as a loss of reputational status. The narratives that this woman used- that the community was catering to those who were un-American (not white) and not “our own”, and that this was to blame for her loss of business, was a troubling trend that I heard framed in different ways in my interviews and observations.

In this way, I argue, these residents were experiencing feelings of what Spanierman & Cabrera (2014) call “white melancholia” that intersected with and informed their assessments of the decline in status and reputation of Parkwood as a function of demographic change. White melancholia “represents an extreme and collective response to white fear” (Spanierman & Cabrera, 2014, p.13), which is a common white response to perceived threats to white privilege and power, often resulting from increased proximity to people of color (Bobo, 1988; Quillian, 1996; Jensen, 2005). Thus, I argue that arguments about decline in the status of Parkwood were,

at least in part, actually representative of whites' fears about their own loss of racial status and associated power in the community.

As will be discussed further in Chapter Six, the perceived decline in Parkwood's status was used as justification by many white residents to flee or avoid moving there altogether as a way to resist living alongside people of color. Despite the efforts of those who stayed to disrupt it, the outside perception and narrative of Parkwood as a community in decline was nearly impossible to shake. While the new residents of color saw Parkwood similarly to the earlier white residents- namely as a place to escape the city, enjoy green space and a quiet neighborhood- to many whites, the community was no longer the idyllic, comfortable suburb it had once been, simply because of who lived there.

'It's Becoming the City': The Meaning of Suburbia When Suburbia is Not white

It was clear from my interviews with parents of color that moving to the suburbs signified an improvement in status from their old neighborhoods in the city. They felt that Parkwood was a safer community and more desirable environment in which to raise their children. And in particular, they believed that suburban schools like those in Parkwood were superior to the schools in the city, and most of them moved specifically to ensure that their children would have the opportunity to attend schools that were better resourced and higher achieving. A quote from Michael, who worked in the nearby city but moved to Parkwood to raise his children, illustrates the way in which the suburban lifestyle and schools were, in his mind, associated with higher status. As we discussed the reputation and quality of the school district, he said, "You know, you're in a suburban district. Like, you're supposed to graduate. You're supposed to go on to college."

However, I learned quickly that for some long-time white residents, the demographic changes in Parkwood led to somewhat of an identity crisis within the community. Parkwood, similar to other suburban communities, was indeed known for being a peaceful, idyllic retreat from the nearby city. It was known for its small-town feel and its status as a desirable community with good schools, inhabited by good people. But its identity and status, since its establishment, was also tied to the fact that nearly all of its residents were white. Thus, as families of color like Michael's moved to Parkwood and began to comprise a substantial portion of the population, set up businesses and places of worship to serve their communities, and sent their children to the local schools, Parkwood's identity as a suburb and the status of the community tied to those who live there was, for some white residents, called into question.

One of the most common ways that people in and outside of Parkwood described the changes in the community was to say that Parkwood was becoming like "the city." As I learned in my interviews, however, these references to the city, however, were not about traffic, construction, or housing, but were a coded way to express a value judgment about changes in community because of the people who lived there. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and others argue, the term "urban" has become synonymous with communities and schools of color—a coded term used to avoid direct references to race.

Theresa, a white woman who had grown up in Parkwood, reflected on the change in the community in more recent years and the ways that parents in her social network talked about what was happening. When I asked her to tell me why so many of her white friends had left a long time ago as residents of color started to move in, she replied, "I just...I know it's the different cultures...the Hispanics and the African-Americans. I think they feel like it's becoming the city and they don't want their kids, um...anywhere near that...it's about color. That's exactly

what it is. There is no reason.” Chris, a white father who had moved to the community recently, told me that white residents often used such coded language to talk about race, “I realized that there was this code that the white people had for how [Parkwood] had changed because they would refer to how it used to be and would say things like, ‘[Parkwood] has changed over time. It’s becoming urban.’ I would read into that, that [Parkwood] has become more black and more Hispanic and so forth.”

Comparing Parkwood to the city was another way that residents signified to each other that the community was no longer suburban in the way that the original suburbs in this region were- predominantly white “vanilla” suburban enclaves on the outskirts of “chocolate” cities that mirrors common usage of “urban” as a code word for spaces occupied by black and brown people (Farley et.al, 1978; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leonardo & Hunter, 2009). When Parkwood was established as a community over the course of the 20th century, there were likely many barriers in place to keep people of color from moving there. Redlining was common practice in the county where Parkwood is located, and in some nearby communities, black residents were strictly barred (Rothstein, 2017). Now that housing discrimination is less explicit and rampant, making it possible for families of color to move in to Parkwood, it no longer carries the same status as a suburban destination for the white community.

False narratives about crime in Parkwood.

Derogatory references to the “urbanification” of Parkwood, as another white interviewee, Daniel called it, were often coupled with statements by Leavers and Choosers about increasing crime rates and general decline in the safety and quality of life in the community. In actuality, local law enforcement reported that crime rates in Parkwood and its surrounding areas had declined in recent years and are similar now to what they were in previous decades. However,

this did not stop current and past residents, as well as those in nearby communities, from spreading rumors about rising crime in the community in recent years. Indeed, reflecting common moral and cultural explanations for racism that are prevalent in the “colorblind” era, these rumors painted residents of color as dangerous and as having deficient values as compared to whites. Thus, this allowed whites who chose to flee the community to use myths of increasing crime rates as a way to defend their actions and avoid having to openly express their racial prejudice.

Some defenders of Parkwood’s reputation blamed the false narratives about crime in Parkwood in part on the way that the community was portrayed in the media and on the Internet. Daniel told me that articles written by an area newspaper, as well as comments online served to feed the racist narratives about the community. He explained,

Whenever there’s a news story on [Parkwood] in [local newspaper] it’s generally negative, nine times out of ten, and the comments that are left are always racially motivated. I mean openly racist comments calling people from different minorities animals, savages. If you continue to let them in from [the nearby city] this is what you’ll get. And [local newspaper] does very little to actually go and flag it and remove these things, which is a point of contention for me because if you’re a potential homebuyer and you google [Parkwood] or you’re looking for news articles you’re getting bombarded with negative things. You have these conversations about [Parkwood] used to be a good community, now it’s gone to Hell, [Parkwood] this, [Parkwood]...it’s over and over again when the numbers, the statistics, the actual quantitative facts don’t show that.

Daniel and others argued that petty crimes like the ones that occur once in a while in Parkwood happen at the same rates in similar, nearby communities with more white residents, but that when these things happen in Parkwood, they are blown out of proportion and fuel the perception that the community is unsafe and in decline. Daniel explained this, telling me that similar instances of criminal activity had been common in Parkwood before families of color had

moved there, but the white community was not alarmed by them in the same ways that they are now:

You know you were finding people dead in [mall] parking lot that were mafia related hits and things like that...supporting this theme or story that there was a lot of mafia in [Parkwood]. People weren't alarmed by that, but you're alarmed the minute that there's some sort of robbery or story about a black or Hispanic person holding up somebody on the street. I think people automatically assume that the crimes and the negative things that do occur are solely the reason or connected to the demographic change. That's it. These crimes were going on [before the demographic change] and it had nothing to do with race, and it was actually in greater proportions but it wasn't looked at that way because it wasn't black or Hispanic people or Asian people.

Susan, a white woman who had grown up in the community, heard similar comments about Parkwood as an undesirable and unsafe place to live expressed by people she encountered who lived in other towns. She worked at a nearby hospital, and recalled a conversation during our interview she had with a colleague the night before. This man was from a nearby town, and was telling a story that involved the use of "burner phones" by criminals. When she asked what a burner phone was, he joked to her, "Oh, you know about burner phones. You live in the ghetto." I asked Susan where she thought his belief about Parkwood as "the ghetto" had come from. "Appearances", she said. "Well, when I say appearances, I mean colors of people's skin. Clearly, it's not the ghetto. They've never been to a ghetto, if they think this is the ghetto, you know?"

Similarly, comments on Facebook from those who were no longer living in Parkwood made clear the extent to which the community had developed a reputation as a crime-ridden, dangerous place to live. From time to time, stories about a robbery or assault would be posted on the page, followed by a swath of responses about how far the community had fallen. Those still living in Parkwood told me countless stories about false rumors and assumptions about crime that spread throughout the community through word of mouth and online and became part of Parkwood's new identity, despite not being true.

Making Sense of School Status: Race, Reputation, and School Quality

While most of my respondents were somewhat guarded when talking to me about race, I gained insight into the explicit and not-so explicit racism that motivated some parents to transfer their children from Riverside to one of the other schools. Many of the white Riverside parents (the Stayers) recounted stories about their acquaintances who transferred their children to Easthaven in particular. These parents expressed a great deal of frustration about how parents outside of the school viewed Riverside. Nearly every white Riverside parent I interviewed said that the school had a negative reputation in the community that was unfounded, and was based on perceptions of the school based on the “diversity” instead of the academic outcomes and quality of instruction. However, those who viewed Riverside in a negative light would argue that it was not as strong of a school academically or in terms of its school culture. This was something that Riverside administrators noted as well, as they struggled to find ways to combat the negative perception of the school. Mr. Gallo, the principal, described his frustration in one of our interviews:

Our ELA and math scores are in alignment with our sister schools...I’m talking to the parents and the parents are saying no, no, no we know you’re doing good things there, but we’re still having a hard time attracting some of the white families because they don’t want their kids to integrate here for some reason. The perception is still kind of that we’re heavily a minority school and they would rather their child not come here. They feel like the academic conversations are not as high here as they are in [Easthaven] and [Westview], which is false because you know I’m with [Westview] and [Easthaven] principals and we talk all the time.

Similarly, Stephanie, a white Riverside parent who was an advocate for the school, explained,

It had such a bad rap for so many years...people are like, “oh no we can’t go into [Riverside], we can’t go to [Riverside],” and it’s like, why? And the reason why is because they don’t like the demographics. They...people don’t want to go because of that... Right, but according to, like if you look at it, Easthaven is mostly white, Westview is mostly white, and Riverside has the least amount. And they don’t want that. And it’s sad, it’s very sad, you know. But that’s the reason, they don’t look at test scores, they don’t look at nothing else but that... And the school knows it.

Common refrains from white parents who opted out of Riverside that accompanied claims about lower academic achievement and standards at Riverside were that the parents and students didn't "value" academics in the same way that those in Easthaven did or, as Daniel stated, "there's this idea that the population that goes to [Parkwood] are not as good." Yet again, seemingly race-neutral narratives that reference cultural and moral deficiencies like these served to fuel larger associations between whiteness and "goodness" while allowing the white people who held these beliefs to avoid explicit references to race and thus, maintain their own status as "colorblind" (Mills, 1997; Crenshaw, 1988; Holme, 2002; Wells, 2018; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). Moreover, these were not only individually held beliefs and perceptions- they became the common sense understandings of school quality among parents across the district. As Cynthia, a black parent at Riverside described these collective racial ideologies and the parents who embodied them,

They become infected. They hear about it. And then instead of really stepping back and investigating who said it and what's really going on, they don't. They just kind of go along with the flow. And they may start to believe that oh it can't be good because it's more ... [Riverside is] more brown than the other schools.

Jennifer, a white resident who had lived in Parkwood for nearly 20 years, was one of many parents who had transferred her children out of Riverside. She had moved to Parkwood from the nearby city before having children, and she and her husband had only looked at the elementary schools before deciding where to settle. Jennifer had visited Riverside only once in her time living there, when her daughter was in kindergarten about ten years earlier. Riverside was hosting a district-wide event in which all schools came together to display student artwork.

During the interview, she repeatedly expressed that had she known that her child would be assigned to Riverside, where she would attend school with students beyond those who

attended her elementary school, that she would have thought twice about her decision to live there. Because multiple elementary schools fed into Riverside, including those that enrolled predominantly black and Latinx students, Riverside enrolled more students of color than the elementary school that Jennifer's daughter attended. Describing her feelings during her visit, she said, "I absolutely hated what I saw. I'm trying to say this nicely...I have to be nice...It wasn't the type of atmosphere I wanted for my children...A lot of the junior high students were there representing the schools and doing tours and I...I didn't care for it."

When I asked her what exactly it was that turned her off about the students at Riverside, she explained that when she initially moved to Parkwood, she opted to move to a neighborhood that she deemed as higher quality, because it was in an area with higher tax rates than other parts of the Parkwood school district. The elementary school that her children were assigned to enrolled other students from that general area- but because there were only three middle and high schools in the district, they would then join together with students who lived in other neighborhoods with lower tax rates and less expensive homes. She said of these neighborhoods and their residents,

It's easier to buy a house. It's not the same. I don't want to say quality of people but...maybe I do want to say it that way. I don't know if it's the right way to say it but you know, you pick a specific neighborhood because you want your children to grow up and be the best person they can be. And I felt that was this part of [Parkwood].

When asked what it was about the students at Riverside that she found to be indicative of the school not being the right place for her child, Jennifer said that the children were "rowdy", and that the hallways were in "chaos." At one point in the interview, she referred to the Riverside children as "animals." However, when asked to describe what it was about the children and their behavior that led her to feel that way, she avoided giving a clear response. Instead, she would

shift the conversation to construct a loose justification for her statements, as in the quote above, when she drew a parallel between the taxes required to live in a particular catchment area and the quality of people living there.

Jennifer went on to say that Riverside Middle School is 90 percent black, and that in terms of diversity, it was less diverse than the school her daughter attended. As noted in Chapter Three, Riverside is not 90 percent black-- it is about 40 percent black-- and when her daughter was in kindergarten more than five years earlier, the percentage black was smaller. But from her perspective, the percentage of black students felt much larger than it was in reality. She then noted that she opted out of sending her daughter to her home school because Easthaven is more diverse, and Riverside is all black. She proclaimed her support for diverse schools, but said that Riverside was not diverse because it was nearly all black, and that Easthaven, in which whites still comprise the majority, was preferable because it was actually truly diverse.

Jennifer was more open in expressing her attitudes about the schools in Parkwood than some of the other parents I interviewed, but her statements were very much in line with what those in the community told me were common amongst white parents. It was evident that she felt strongly about the changing demographics in the community based on the disdain in her voice as she described her visit to Riverside many years earlier. As she spoke about the children in the building, who likely ranged in age from about eleven to thirteen years, her words were full of disgust. She said that she was so turned off by her experience there that she never considered sending her children to school there, even if she had to move. However, her lack of ability to give examples to explain her feelings, her statements about the quality of people in the Easthaven area, as well as her exaggeration of the number of black students who attended Riverside, indicated that it was the students themselves and the black students in particular, that made her

react the way she did. The race of the students had led her to make assumptions about who they were and what their presence in the school meant. Jennifer saw the black students at Riverside as lower-status, less “good”, and unruly, and she considered those who paid higher taxes in whiter neighborhoods, to be better people (Mills, 1997; Crenshaw, 1998; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995; Wells, 2018). It was this—her embodiment of moral and cultural racist ideologies and racial fears of her daughter attending a school with a predominantly black population—rather than anything tangible, that was guiding her meaning making about the status of the school as a whole (Crenshaw, 1988; Jenson, 2005; Bobo, 1988).

Another interesting theme from Jennifer’s interview was that while she was steadfast and unwavering in her negative beliefs about Riverside, she also showed some awareness that there was something about her beliefs that was, in some way, wrong. She made comments several times throughout the interview, like in the first quote above, that she “needed to be nice” and use caution when choosing the words to describe Riverside. This appeared almost like a fleeting acknowledgement that she held racial biases, and needed to find a way to express them that would obscure it. She said several times with conviction that she is “far from racist” and expressed concern at times that I would take her statements the “wrong way”. It was clearly important to Jennifer that I not take her perceptions of Riverside to be an indication that she is not a good, kind person, indicating that while she very much subscribed to common racist ideologies about black inferiority and white moral/cultural goodness, she also embodied ideologies of colorblindness that led her to feel the need to proclaim her status as non-racist.

Rumors and perceptions of discipline problems.

Similarly to the narratives of crime and danger that plagued Parkwood as a whole, when talking about the schools, discussions about Riverside in particular often focused on perceived

problems with discipline, gangs, and the idea that families in Riverside didn't value education in the same ways as those attending the other two schools. Based on interviews with administrators in the district and the extensive time I spent in the schools, there were no discipline issues in Riverside outside of the occasional incident typical of middle and high schools, and suspension rates across all three secondary schools were very similar. But still, rumors about what happened in Riverside proliferated around the town, fueling its poor reputation and designation as the lower status of the three schools in the district. As Stephanie, expressing her frustration, explained about the parents who transfer:

They think 'oh its not a safe school, its not a good school.' Meanwhile our scores are just as good as Easthaven, better. I think this year we actually have higher scores than Easthaven. But because these people, and I hate to use the word prejudice, but that's what they are, they don't want to go because they go 'oh my kid's not safe' and it is so ridiculous.

Daniel described similar comments about Riverside that he received from those who fled the community as it was changing. He recalled the perceptions that others held of the school being dangerous, which were not based in reality, and were tied to ideas about the "goodness" of the children who attended the school,

They'd say things like 'Oh wow, it must have been rough going there', or 'oh wow, you gotta be careful you don't get stabbed in the hallways', and like all these things that just don't exist. There was this perception that it's a bad school. You know if you looked at the numbers too I bet that the people that have chosen to defer going to [Riverside], and have had their children after go to [Easthaven] or [Westview], despite any academic distinguishes it's kind of like there's this idea that the population that goes to [Riverside] are not as good.

Riverside parents and administrators that I interviewed noted that the school's location was one of the factors contributing to its reputation of having discipline problems. The middle and high school are located on a busy street in the town, whereas the Easthaven and Westview

campuses are off the beaten path, tucked inside of residential neighborhoods without through traffic. In my interviews, Riverside parents and administrators noted that white residents who drove by the school during dismissal would see students congregating or joking around with one another and would make assumptions about the school being dangerous because of what was perceived as unruly behavior of students of color. Mr. Gallo told me about a particular incident as an example:

I'm running my meeting so just security was outside and we get a phone call from a parent [saying] "There's a fight!" So you know I leave my meeting and run outside. It was just 2 kids playing around. You know they were just like of like shadow boxing they call it, you know, and I still do it with my brother and I'm 36, you know, and I'll still do it.

Mr. Gallo explained that the visibility of Riverside being on a main street, coupled with the fact that many of the students are black or Latinx, heightened awareness of what was going on in and around the school and led to rumors and negative perceptions based on the students' race. Mr. Gallo spoke about other times when community members would see something out of the ordinary outside of the Riverside school building and make incorrect assumptions about what was going on. In one such incident, a student had an asthma attack, and an ambulance was called, leading to rumors throughout town that a violent fight had broken out. Stephanie described similar instances of kids playing around in front of the school, which has led community members to gossip about the students being troublemakers.

Thus, at Riverside, kids who were laughing and playing with one another were assumed to be dangerous troublemakers rather than typical children enjoying time with their friends. This was similar in nature to the story Jennifer recalled from her visit to Riverside when her daughter was a kindergartner that I described in the previous section. The assumptions about danger and the moral/cultural deficiency of students of color in Riverside served as color-blind narratives to

justify racist ideologies and assessment of the status of the school and the students themselves (Mills, 1997; Crenshaw, 1988).

These perceptions of the safety of schools in Parkwood had real consequences, as they were hurtful to the Riverside community and were used to back up arguments about school status which, as will be discussed in Chapter Six, served to justify decisions of white parents to transfer out of the school or leave the community altogether. This also had an impact on institutional policies and practices of district leaders and Riverside administrators who were committed to improving the school's reputation among white residents and parents, which I discuss further in Chapter Seven. In this way, Harris' (1993) theory of whiteness as reputational and status property can clearly be seen in the case of Riverside's loss of status as a result of its perception as a "black" school.

White "Stayers" and the Endurance of Associations between Whiteness and Status

The perspectives of the Stayers in Parkwood- the white residents whose children were assigned to attend Riverside who did not transfer their children to Easthaven or Westview, provided an interesting contrast to those of other white residents and parents in Parkwood. The white Riverside parents were some of the most vocal proponents of the community and schools, and were consistently defending it against rumors about crime, danger, and decline that spread amongst other social networks. However, as I discuss in this chapter, while these parents critiqued the racialized status ideologies and assumptions about danger, crime, and declining quality of Parkwood associated with changing demographics, they generally did not see these ideologies as tied to broader structures of racism. These white parents, instead, used colorblind narratives to explain how they were different from other Parkwood residents who were

“prejudiced” and, at the same time, often embodied and expressed similar race-based status ideologies themselves in other ways.

The Stayers and the Defense of Riverside’s Reputation and Status.

The white Riverside parents that I interviewed often expressed defensiveness, frustration, anger, and even hurt feelings when discussing the families who choose to transfer to Easthaven and Westview. Katie was one of these parents. She noted that she and other parents regularly defended the school against rumors and pointing out that the other schools in the district were similar,

I'm very defensive about the school. I think any of the ones that don't choose to transfer and we stay at [Riverside], I think you'd find most of us are very defensive about and protective about [Riverside], because again it's that whole perception and they say the bad things. I know one of my friends she's like really very protective of the school. Something came up the other day and they're like, ‘oh, I heard about something that happened at [Riverside]. I don't know how she found out about it but she knew something that happened at [Easthaven], she's like yeah, well what about this. Definitely, very protective of the school and the reputation and anything good happens we're all really quick to put it out there, but you always hear the bad.

Stephanie was the most outspoken defender of Riverside and the Parkwood community of the parents that I interviewed. She spent talked extensively about the Riverside’s undeserved negative reputation, expressing her passionate frustration about the parents who transferred their children from Riverside, and regularly defended against comments on the community Facebook pages as well. “No matter what you do,” she said, “like we’re on Facebook and we try to...you know...it’s like running uphill. You turn blue in the face and no one listens.”

Some of the Stayers, including Stephanie, also said that some of their current or former neighbors looked down upon them because of their decision to send their children to Riverside. Because the choice process began in middle school, many of the children of the Choosers and Stayers had attended the same elementary school and had been friends at the time. However,

there was now a divide between the white Stayers and Choosers, which, according to Stephanie, was a result of perceived status differences between the two groups related to where their children attended school. She described the Choosers as “snobs” who no longer wanted to associate with her or other Stayers. She provided an example of a time that she was speaking to a woman that she had attended high school with in the nearby city. At the time, their children attended elementary school together, and were preparing to go to middle school the next year.

When Stephanie told the woman, who was planning to transfer her child to Easthaven, that she was sending her son to Riverside, the woman reacted coldly.

She put her nose up,” Stephanie said. “It just shows ya. We all went to high school together. We all...but you know, one went to [Easthaven], one went to [Riverside], and we were all in the same circles in high school. But she stuck her nose up and that was it, she would never talk to me again.

This interaction and others described by the Stayers in earlier sections indicates how even the status of white residents suffered a result of their association with Riverside and Parkwood in general. Stephanie described the incident with a tone that indicated that she was more angry and put off by the woman’s behavior than she was hurt- but still, it was clear as I listened to her speak that it had gotten under her skin. As a result, the white Riverside parents spent much energy working to change the negative reputation and convince other parents that it was unfounded, including making comments on discussions about school quality on Facebook threads and attending Mr. Gallo’s meetings at elementary schools.

While I could understand the frustration that these parents felt about the negative perception of Riverside and Parkwood, I noticed that among the Riverside parents that I interviewed, the white parents were much more likely to be bothered by the rumors and unfounded reputation of the school than were the parents of color. The parents of color I interviewed were, in large part, either unaware of the negative reputation or were unbothered by

it. They often referenced high test scores and graduation rates, safety, and school resources when explaining what made them choose to send their children to Riverside, and rarely spoke of word-of-mouth discussions about status and reputation.

Thus, I found that the associations between race and status of the schools was much more impactful for white parents in the district than for parents of color, and in spite of what their school choice decisions might imply, the Stayers were no exception. The Stayers were protective of the reputation of Riverside and were able to clearly describe the racist ideology that contributed to the declining perception of their community and schools- but given how many of these parents saw Parkwood as distinct from lower status “urban” communities, I wondered if their defensiveness and frustration was, in a way, tied to their desire to uphold that reputation that distinguished their neighborhood and schools from other communities of color, and to insulate themselves from defamation by being associated with a “minority” school and community (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

“It’s Not Like That Here.”

The Stayers were often very quick to defend Parkwood against the rumors swirling in the community and online, and they challenged the notion that Parkwood was becoming “urban,” dangerous, and undesirable as a result of the changing demographics. Many of them said that Parkwood was not nearly as unsafe as its reputation implied, and that it was distinct from the urban areas that it is often compared to. Further, a number of my interviewees blamed the crime that did occur in Parkwood on city residents who crossed over the border. On multiple occasions, in interviews and on Facebook posts I observed, current residents responded when reports of a crime within the Parkwood limits occurred, that it was likely committed by someone who was from the city, so it was not representative of the good people who lived in Parkwood. In this

way, for the Stayers, distinguishing Parkwood from the city was an important way that they continued to make sense of the community as high status in light of the increasing presence of residents of color that threatened that status.

Susan, one of the white residents who had lived in Parkwood her whole life, explained that criminal activity happening in the area around the shopping mall was due to the fact that residents from the city would do their shopping there,

There's a lot of bad press around that mall. Unfortunately, there's not a lot of malls in [city], or there's not malls that you can park for free. We're so close to the city line, that we get a lot of people from outside of [Parkwood]. Most of what happens in the mall isn't us. It's not, it's different.

Susan then went on to talk about another mall in a Whiter, more affluent suburb further from the city that has similar rates of criminal activity but does not get the same bad publicity, "It just doesn't get the ...you know, it's sensationalism. I tell people, 'I heard about a stabbing last week at [other mall]. What are you talking about? It happens everywhere.'"

The way that the Stayers talked about crime and the city was very interesting and somewhat contradictory. While they pushed back strongly against the idea that Parkwood has become a lower-status community plagued with crime as a result of the residents of color who had moved there and challenged notions that Parkwood is becoming city-like, they themselves carried perceptions about the city and those who lived there. These loyal Parkwoodians, who in some ways challenged notions of whiteness as tied to reputation and status, also carried with them strong associations between the "goodness" of people who live in urban vs. suburban areas, which are often code words that whites use to talk about racial differences across communities. These ideologies were similar to those that were used by other white Parkwood parents and residents--namely the Choosers and the Leavers--to make assumptions about what the increasing

presence of people of color implied about the reputation of the community and schools (Harris, 1993; Mills, 1997; Crenshaw, 1988, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Similarly, while the white Riverside parents were adamant that their decision not to transfer their children to the whiter schools was an indication that they are not racist, they still express perceptions about other high-poverty, high-minority schools as being dangerous and low-quality, particularly those in urban areas, yet Riverside is different. One such parent, Stephanie, was a former police officer, and had worked in a mostly-black neighborhood in the city that, according to her, had problems with high crime rates. Her ex-husband, who was also a police officer working in the same community, had developed a negative perception of black neighborhoods and became fearful when he saw the demographic changes happening in Parkwood. They had arguments over where their son would attend school as a result, as her husband wanted him to transfer to Easthaven rather than attend Riverside where he was assigned. She recalled during our interview,

[My husband and I] were both police officers in [a nearby city]. Seen it all. You know, not the best neighborhoods, you know what I'm saying? So, his father goes, 'He's not staying, he's not going to Riverside. He's going to Easthaven.' Again, being biased because he's seen a lot of things. And I go, well it isn't like that out here, it's different.

In this statement, Stephanie was clearly drawing a distinction between the status of Riverside and that of this neighborhood in the city in a way that indicated not that there is a problem with associating status, safety, and goodness with whiteness, but that Parkwood was a community, and Riverside a school, that defied the norm typical of communities of color. Other Riverside parents made similar statements about Parkwood and Riverside being unique in this way, and often referenced the “quality” of students and families of color as though they were exceptional. While many of these parents cited the benefits of having their children attend schools in which they were exposed to children from different racial and cultural backgrounds,

when asked if they would consider sending their children to schools in other communities in the city or in less affluent suburban areas, most replied that they would not. Thus, I understood from these interviews that the “stayers” were not making decisions to stay in the community and schools based on having a critical awareness of how racial ideologies were at work, but because they saw the parents of color (who, on average, had higher incomes and higher levels of education than whites in Parkwood) and students (who were similarly high-achieving when compared with white students) as distinct from the more stereotypical perceptions of those who lived in poorer and urban communities. Thus, racial status ideologies and the reputational functions of whiteness as property were still evident in the meaning-making of white parents in Riverside despite their “against the grain” school choices (Harris, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1994; Reay et.al, 2011).

Quality of Riverside tied to white teachers and administrators.

In my interviews with the stayers, I wanted to understand how they made sense of the reputation, quality, and status of Riverside and how their meaning making differed from the white parents who left the district or transferred their children to Easthaven or Westview. When asking them what about Riverside, in their view, made it a “good” school, parents continuously pointed to the strength of the teachers and administrators (nearly all of whom are white) as the key to what allowed the school to thrive. This was an interesting contrast to the Leavers and Choosers, who talked about the students and families, who they viewed as lower status, less moral, and lower “quality” than those in Easthaven and Westview, as their reason for leaving.

Mr. Gallo was an extremely popular principal among the parents, students, and staff, and in interviews, parents often noted that he was one of the key reasons why Riverside was the high-quality school that it is. Nancy, a white parent who, like many of the Stayers, was close with Mr.

Gallo and spoke often of her admiration for him, told me, “I can’t say enough wonderful things about this man, you know...he’s the glue. He’s so loved and respected. He’s the heart...or the heart, the brain, the soul.”

A number of parents noted that Riverside was not as good of a school before Mr. Gallo arrived to serve as principal, but that he had turned the school around. Susan was one of the first white stayers that I interviewed. When I asked her why she chose to stay at Riverside, she responded, “There’s no reason not to make this choice because it’s a great school. If it was the way I heard it was years ago, maybe there would’ve been things. But [Mr. Gallo] is fantastic, the scores are fantastic, the staff is fantastic, the building is immaculate. Like, there’s no reason.”

Another parent, Elizabeth, was a teacher at Riverside who had chosen to transfer her children to Easthaven, but after having spent more time working in Riverside, had come to regret her decision. She explained that at the time she was making her choice, she had just started working there and the rumors about the school had persuaded her to transfer her children. However, she now believed that Mr. Gallo had improved the school since he arrived, replacing the former principal, Mrs. Reece. I asked her what had changed about Riverside. She replied, “It has to do with administration. [Mrs. Reece] used to be here. It’s definitely not the same now that [Mr. Gallo] is running the school. So it’s just a big difference between administration and who’s running the school. It makes a big difference in the way the staff feels, the morale.”

Stephanie, who called Mr. Gallo a “superstar,” said that she often worried that because of his success, he would soon move on to another job as a district-level administrator. She felt that the school would not be the same without him; a feeling that other parents shared as well. And in fact, as rumors about his possible exit swirled around the school in the later stages of my data collection process, Stephanie noted that white parents who had thus far planned to stay in

Riverside were considering transferring their children if he were to leave the school. “Well, that’s what they say,” she said. “Without [Mr. Gallo], forget it, I’m not going.” Towards the very end of my time spent in Parkwood, Mr. Gallo did end up leaving Riverside to take a higher-level administrative role in a nearby district. When the decision was being discussed at a district wide board meeting, a number of white parents sitting near me debated whether they would remain in the school with him gone, and expressed their concerns that the school would “fall apart” upon his departure.

It was clear based on my interviews and observations that Mr. Gallo, and to a lesser extent, the other administrators and teachers, were a major part of the draw that led a contingent of white parents to stay in Riverside despite its perceived status among whites as dangerous and low-quality. It’s important to note as well, as will be discussed further in Chapter Seven, that part of what made Mr. Gallo such a great school leader, in the eyes of the white parents, was his strength as a disciplinarian. Parents and teachers alike often pointed out that Mr. Gallo and his assistant principals would walk the school hallways during class changes and stay outside after dismissal until students had gone home to ensure that they were not misbehaving.

Indeed, the interviews with white “stayers” in Riverside made clear that the mostly white school leadership and staff, and especially Mr. Gallo, were key to why they wanted their children to attend the school. And more notably, the data from these interviews indicate that white parents viewed the status and quality of Riverside as fragile, based on the fact that many said they might not stay at Riverside if Mr. Gallo left and that Mr. Gallo’s ability to keep the students under control through strong disciplinary practices was part of what they considered to be his strength. In this way, many white parents seem to equate the quality of the school with the efforts of the white staff and principal, and viewed them as the key to the school being good *in spite of*, rather

than because of, the students who attended. Thus, while these Stayers saw through some of the rumors about Riverside, which, as I discuss below, was a source of pride for them and served as indication that they were “colorblind” and distinct from the Choosers and Leavers, they still held strong ideas about the status of the school being driven by whiteness.

Colorblind ideology as integral to the meaning making of the Stayers.

The white Riverside parents that I interviewed, in the context of defending the school’s reputation against rumors and perceptions of other white parents who fled, expressed their own decisions to stay in Riverside as reflective of their colorblind racial attitudes. In fact, nearly every white parent I spoke with in Parkwood made a point to declare that they are not racist, but for the Stayers, their identity as “colorblind” was a key part of how they explained the differences between themselves and the white parents who left. They saw themselves as clearly distinct from the Leavers and Choosers in a way that, for some, seemed to invoke a sense of pride.

Theresa, when talking about her son and why she wanted him to attend Riverside, declared, “I never want him to ever look at somebody differently.” She went on to explain how other white children in her son’s class when he was in elementary school had decided early on to transfer out of Riverside, “The kids in his class, forget it. Those parents, already, going into fourth grade said ‘my kids are going to [Easthaven]. I live right across from [Riverside], but I’m going to [Easthaven].’ Good riddance.” I then asked Theresa to explain how she was different from those parents who transferred, and she replied that it was about how she was raised, “I think the parents...because my parents never saw color...And I know most parents saw color and there's less black kids over there [in Easthaven].”

Stephanie also talked about her decision to send her sons to Riverside as being tied to her colorblindness. When I asked her why she had stayed after other parents transferred, she replied, “Cause I don’t want to be prejudiced, I don’t want to be biased, you know what I’m saying? I just don’t want to.” When asked to explain more about how she felt as the community and schools became more racially diverse over time, she said, “I’ll be perfectly honest. I really didn’t look. I didn’t want to be like...you know, raise my children to look at people differently. Because that’s not me.”

Susan, one of the Riverside parents who had lived in the community her whole life, expressed similar attitudes, and explained that she was grateful that her children were able to live in a world in which racism and racial tension were no longer prevalent in the ways that they were in the past. Describing a conversation with her son, she said, “We watched that on the Smithsonian Channel, and he was shocked that things were so different back then and in other places. My kids never saw that, so I think it’s a gift to them. Everybody gets along. You don’t see a lot of racial tension, you really don’t see that. Everybody just kind of co-exists.”

Susan’s statements about racism being a thing of the past, and Parkwood being a community in which racism is not a problem, were indicative of Bonilla Silva’s (2018) description of the minimization of racism as a common frame used by whites who embody colorblind racist ideologies. I found overall that for the white Stayers in my sample, their status as “colorblind”, and Parkwood’s status as a racially harmonious community, was important to how they viewed themselves and their town within the broader context of demographic change.

However, as exemplified by the data on whiteness and reputational status in Parkwood, and as I will describe further in Chapters Six and Seven, structures of racism very much *did* exist in Parkwood just as in the rest of the country. And furthermore, narratives of colorblindness and

race-neutrality often served to obscure the true racialized nature of white residents' beliefs and actions, that would, in turn, reproduce and maintain inequity and racialized power hierarchies in the community and schools (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Conclusion: Race and Status in Parkwood in the Era of Colorblindness

These findings on how the white residents of Parkwood made sense of race and reputation in their community and schools provide evidence of how the social constructions of neighborhood and school reputation and quality by many white residents were informed by dominant racial ideologies of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2018), racial status ideologies and whiteness as property (Harris, 1993; Holme, 2002; Wells, 2018; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008) and assessments of the moral and cultural inferiority of people of color (Mills, 1997; Crenshaw, 1988; Omi & Winant, 1994; Bonilla-Silva, 2018) in the post-civil rights era.

Beliefs among former and current white residents that the status of Parkwood had declined along with the decline in the white population, that mirrored broader patterns of racial ideology in the post-civil rights era, in turn, became part of the dominant common-sense knowledge surrounding the community of Parkwood and its schools. In this way, the story of Parkwood highlights a real-life manifestation of Harris's (1993) notion of the reputational and status properties of whiteness in that the migration of residents of color to Parkwood served to "defame" the community and schools.

Indeed, the loss of whiteness resulted in a subsequent decline in reputational and status property, and was tied to assessments of the loss of safety, prestige, and moral character in Parkwood, independent of actual characteristics that are typically associated with assessing school and neighborhood "quality." In turn, white people, their neighborhoods, and schools were associated with positive reputational status solely as a result of their association with whiteness.

As I explain in the following two findings chapters, this meaning making, which reflects social theories on the social construction of reputation tied to race had consequences that went well beyond the individual meaning making and ideologies of white parents and residents. It also became institutionalized to the extent that it guided the actions of white parents and leaders, which served to further reinforce broader racial inequities and systems of racial hierarchy.

CHAPTER SIX

White Parents' Actions and Racial Power Dynamics In Parkwood

In this chapter, I go beyond an examination of white parents' meaning making about race, status, and racial change, to explain how the actions and behaviors of white parents served to reproduce and uphold racial boundaries and asymmetrical power relationships amid demographic shifts in Parkwood. These actions were often justified by ideologies and narratives tied to the social constructions of school and neighborhood status and colorblindness that were discussed in Chapter Five. In this chapter, I highlight the ways in which the actions of white parents—including their school choices and response to discussions of race and racism in the district—led to further racial segregation, marginalization, and exclusion of people of color. These racialized acts that were often described by white parents through a race-neutral or colorblind lens. I argue that such framing allowed whites to maintain their comfort and privilege of not having to think about, acknowledge, or address racism (DiAngelo, 2018). In this way, the actions of whites contributed to the maintenance of racial power dynamics in which whiteness is privileged and protected even as whites comprise a smaller and smaller proportion of the population in the community and schools.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of how some white residents, using their racialized understandings of status and false narratives of the community and schools becoming more dangerous in light of demographic change as justification, acted in ways to physically separate themselves and their children from residents of color. Some white residents (the “Leavers”) did this by fleeing the community altogether. Many of the Leavers justified their decisions based on fears that their property values would decline or fears of the perceived decline in the safety,

quality, and desirability of the community following demographic change. Others, (the “Choosers”) who could not or did not want to move out of Parkwood, managed to separate themselves to some extent through the use of Parkwood’s intra-district transfer policy, which approximately one hundred white parents used to transfer from Riverside to Easthaven or Westview each year. These acts of physical separation by whites in response to increasing neighborhood and school diversity is an example of how whiteness as property functions as reputational status and, in turn, serves as justification for the right to exclude those of other racial groups (Harris, 1993).

Over time, the mass exodus of whites from Riverside led to greater inequity across schools in Parkwood as a result of the loss of reputational status and, in turn, student enrollment and per-pupil funding for Riverside. These findings highlight the cyclical nature of re-segregation and inequality discussed by Wells et.al. (2014), as the intangible factors (e.g. reputation, status and prestige) shift in the minds of white homebuyers and parents prior to any shift in the tangible (material resources and educational programs) in schools. But over time, as school enrollments and property values decline, the tangible aspects of school systems decline as well. Wells et.al, (2014) refer to this process as the self-fulfilling prophecy of segregation.

Beyond those who fled the district altogether or opted out of Riverside for schools with larger white populations, there were the white residents of Parkwood who did neither of the above. While on the surface, these “Stayers” may appear more progressive when it comes to issues of race and their school choice decisions, what I learned was that this was not necessarily the case. In the second part of this chapter, I explain how the white parents who in many ways went “against the grain” by choosing not to move out of the community or use the transfer policy to physically separate their children from students of color still maintained their white power and

privilege within the Riverside school building. This was done in large part through the use of colorblind narratives to prevent, resist, and circumvent race-conscious conversations and the implementation of policies and practices within the school and district that were intended to specifically serve the needs of students of color. I highlight multiple examples of instances in which the voices of students and parents of color in Parkwood were silenced and marginalized to prioritize the comfort, privilege, and control of whites in a school in which they comprise less than ten percent of the overall population.

Thus, whether whites responded by separating themselves from spaces in which they would comprise a racial minority (as was the case with the Leavers and Choosers) or by acting in ways within such spaces that served to prevent policies and practices that would serve the interests of people of color, efforts to maintain and preserve white privilege, control, and power was a constant across different groups of whites who called Parkwood their home. As will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Seven, the actions of white Leavers, Choosers, and Stayers, which were informed by their racial ideologies, were instrumental in influencing institutional policies and practices that functioned as barriers to racial progress. In other words, the status ideologies and fears of losing power and status that I described in Chapter Five informed the actions of whites that would then contribute to the recreation of racial hierarchies and forms of physical and cultural exclusion that marginalized students and parents of color in Parkwood. This explicates the iterative relationship between social structures and the meaning making and behaviors of individual actors. Moreover, this occurred under a broader shroud of colorblind ideology that dominated the narrative in Parkwood and made the process ever more difficult to interrupt.

The Leavers: The First to Flee

As I discussed in Chapter Five, many longtime white Parkwood residents were unhappy as residents of color began to move in to the community, starting in about the 1990s. Many felt that these new residents did not belong or “fit” with the culture and way of life in their town; that their presence signified that the town was no longer the town they had called home for many years. What it meant to be a part of that community, in this way, was tied to white racial identity, culture, and norms. Furthermore, as I argued in Chapter Five, such negative racial attitudes and ideologies expressed about demographic changes in Parkwood were likely tied to fear on the part of white parents over perceived threats to their status and privilege as more people of color made the community their home.

Some Parkwood residents responded to their fears and concerns by immediately working to establish physical separation between themselves and residents of color. A real estate agent, Lisa, who had worked in Parkwood when the demographics began to change, talked about how as more residents of color started to move in, white people in the community would ask that she not sell homes in their neighborhoods to anyone who was not white in an effort to keep their neighborhood white and preserve their property values, which they expected to go down if it became racially diverse.

As the changes continued, other white residents chose to flee in response to the increasing racial diversity in the community. One of the white interviewees in my study, Theresa, had lived in Parkwood her whole life. She remembered how many white families, who were able to, left the community right away as people of color began to move to Parkwood beginning in the 1980s and 90s. When I asked her why they had left, she replied; “I’ll tell you, it’s really racism. Because once an ethnic, black, Hispanic family moves in, anyone that I went to

school with, they're like you know... 'Got to get out. There's black people'... they moved out right away as soon as the first black family moved in."

She went on to talk about how those who left Parkwood altogether tended to be express racist attitudes more overtly than the white residents who stayed, and that she was surprised by the racism expressed by her former classmates, who would casually throw around the "n-word" when talking about their new neighbors. This use of derogatory language signifies a strong emotional response: expressions of hatred likely driven by feelings of anger, fear and resentment at what would happen to their level of comfort and power in this town if white residents were no longer the sole occupants. These expressions are not unlike what we see today across the country as whites react in opposition and fear to changing racial demographics and efforts to disrupt racialized systems of power and oppression (Anderson, 2016; Craig & Richeson, 2014a, 2014b; Spanierman & Cabrera, 2014; Hage, 2003; Feldman & Huddy, 2005; Major et.al, 2016)

Lisa, the local real estate agent, also had clients who told her they wanted to sell their homes and move to communities further outside of the city specifically because of the changing demographics. She recalled that some expressed feelings of discomfort at the idea of being white in a community that may no longer be identifiably white, while others felt concerned over the possibility that their property values would decline as the community became less white and therefore, less desirable;

I did have sellers who said to me 'I don't want to be the last white person here or I don't want to wait too long and then the prices drop.' So they felt they wanted to get out while there was still...or they didn't want to wait too long because they thought that maybe the home prices and the schools would change if too many black came in.

In this way, we can see how whiteness manifests not only as a form of property through symbolic mechanisms, but can be an actual form of economic property in that the homes in Parkwood, like other changing suburbs, lose desirability and, in turn, economic value when they

are no longer associated with the status and reputational property of whiteness (Perry, Rothwell & Harshbarger, 2018; Wells et.al, 2014).

Lisa went on to describe her own perspectives after having interacted with a number of clients who expressed their desires to leave Parkwood specifically because of demographic change. We talked about the perception of property value decline and how it is often used as justification for white flight, even as those who are fleeing claim that they themselves are not racist. However, Lisa's experience working with these Leavers left her with quite a different impression about their motivations for moving. She said,

You know I would say the majority of the people who sold at that point were absolutely the most prejudiced bigoted people you would ever want to meet... they just were completely intolerant. They did not want to live in a community that was integrated. They only wanted to live with people who were exactly like themselves, and they said that.

Daniel, one of the life-long residents of Parkwood who was now in his mid-twenties, recalled that many of his friends left Parkwood when he in school. He also shared that another suburb, "East Lake", which was farther from the city and was not seeing the same patterns of demographic change that were happening in Parkwood, was a particularly popular destination for the whites who fled- to the extent that it became known as "Parkwood East." He said, "I remember in elementary school a lot of kids, like 5th, 6th grade, were like oh I'm moving. My family's moving out to [East Lake]. A lot of [Parkwoodians] joke that [East Lake] is [Parkwood East]. You could pretty much pick a block and knock on a door and you'd find someone from [Parkwood]."

It is notable that East Lake, located just miles from other communities and school districts that have substantial populations of black, Asian and Latinx families, remains over 97 percent white today. East Lake also has similar crime rates and school outcomes to Parkwood,

and East Lake's school district was ranked slightly lower than Parkwood in the local newspaper. However, the Leavers were able to establish themselves in a community that very closely resembles the Parkwood of their earlier years.

Daniel also identified contradictions inherent in how those who left described their decisions to move away. He believed that many of his former neighbors used justifications about Parkwood's decline, as discussed in Chapter Five, to assuage guilt over their desires to separate themselves from people of color. He stated:

I know a lot of people that have since left that like to remark about [Parkwood] being a bad place, and I think that's so they could justify their decision, because you almost felt that guilt. Those people felt bad for leaving. It wasn't just like oh we're moving because we have a new opportunity. We're moving to get away from people.

Indeed, as Daniel and others argued, the justifications used by those who left Parkwood were largely false, and were simply a rhetorical strategy to avoid identifying the actual reason for leaving. Despite claims from the Leavers that the community was on a downward trend in terms of status and quality of life measures that are often associated with living in a well to do suburban community, as I have noted in previous chapters, the residents of color in Parkwood were of similar, if not higher, socioeconomic backgrounds than the white residents in the community. Indeed, Kenton, a black father whose children were in elementary school at the time of his interview, noted that many of the new residents of color moving in held higher-status and higher-paying jobs than many of the white residents of Parkwood. However, this did not change the desires of some white residents to move- because it wasn't really about the education levels, jobs, or social class of those who were moving in that made them want to leave- it was about race. He said, "You know, if you don't like a person because of their race it doesn't really matter

what they do for a living- you just see that person. So if that's gonna cause you to move it's gonna cause you to move."

In this way, the justifications and racial frames used to explain the actions of whites who left Parkwood as a result of the changing demographics highlight the ways in which colorblind narratives can obscure behaviors that are very much guided by racist ideologies and that reproduce structures of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

The Choosers: Using the Transfer Policy to Flee Riverside

For white residents who were not happy with the demographic change in Parkwood, but for whatever reason either chose to stay or were unable to move out of the community, the intra-district transfer policy served as a convenient way for them to create some physical separation between themselves (and their children) and many residents of color. While Easthaven and Westview have, in more recent years, seen increasing numbers of students of color enrolling, the proportion of white students is still the largest of all racial subgroups in the two schools. And as discussed in previous chapters, these two schools are located farther from the city/suburban boundary and were seen as higher status than Riverside despite having virtually equal academic outcomes.

A number of respondents discussed how some of the remaining white residents in Parkwood would have liked to move, but some were unsure of where to go or were not able to move due to cost or proximity to their families or work. Theresa told me that a number of her friends and neighbors talked about leaving regularly, but, as she said, "not everybody has a choice of selling their house and uprooting...or want to." However, she noted, these residents did choose to transfer their children to Easthaven when they entered middle school. And some were

still considering moving—either to communities further into outer-ring suburbs, or even to different states—because Easthaven’s population was changing more as well.

Jennifer, the parent discussed in Chapter Five who transferred her child out of Riverside and into Easthaven, told me that she would move out of Parkwood altogether if she could, and that had she known how the community was going to change, she never would have moved there in the first place. Jennifer decided years before her daughter entered middle school that she would not send her to Riverside based on her perception of the students in the school, who she described as almost all black, and behaving as “animals” who were “rowdy” in a school that was filled with “chaos.” While my efforts to talk to other parents who made the same decision were often unsuccessful, as these parents were guarded over being perceived as racist and did not want to be recognized within Easthaven as the “transfer families,” I learned of many similar stories about other parents who left from my white parent interviewees who stayed in Riverside.

In an interview with a Nancy, the Riverside parent who also worked at the school, the two of us sat at her kitchen table as she spoke about many of her son’s friends who had transferred. I asked her why she thought they were leaving, and she said that while she was not certain, she suspected that it was tied to race. As her son walked into the room, she asked him what reason his friend Antonio had given to explain why he was not attending Riverside. Her son Patrick, who was in seventh grade, replied automatically and nonchalantly, “Because there’s a lot of black people that go to Riverside. Antonio says it’s ghetto.” Nancy nodded as though he had confirmed her hunch and continued, “I always remember this one mom saying, ‘well, I’m transferring him out because I’ve seen what comes out of that school.’”

Theresa recounted similar conversations with her neighbors who, when she asked why they wanted to use the transfer policy, would reply, “I don’t want them to go with those kids.”

When she asked them what they meant by that, she said they were unable to give a reason. “They don’t know anything,” she said. “They know what they see on TV.”

Nancy also mentioned the perception of Riverside that I discussed in Chapter Five as the sole reason that most white parents transferred their children. She told me about another of her son’s friends who did not want her child to attend Riverside: “One day the mom and I were talking, and she’s like, ‘well, isn’t it rough there?’ That’s like the perception of it.” Susan, a life-long Parkwood resident, also described how the inaccurate perceptions of the schools that were directly tied to racism fueled parents’ decisions to transfer their children. Susan said:

You listen to peoples’ thoughts...you listen to your friends, so to speak. Other parents. Then I reached fourth grade and I realized I really had to start considering. I thought to myself, “Well, really what’s wrong with the school? Why are people...” When I asked people why they moved, they would always give me very vague answers. Nobody could say, “Oh, well the graduation rates are so much higher or “oh, it’s a much safer atmosphere.” They were giving me very vague things, and there were some people who were not so vague. One girl said to me, “The girl across the street goes to Riverside, and you should hear the way she talks. She doesn’t even talk like a human being.” I would hear things like that, and then you hear like racial tone to it, and it’s like...it’s not the kind of way I think I am or want to be. Then you start to realize it’s not just a better school.

It was true, as Susan said, and as I explained in earlier chapters, that Riverside’s measurable academic outcomes remained on par with Easthaven and Westview. Thus, one might argue that the white flight from Riverside was not actually causing any real problems for the school. After all, why would the school want white parents who saw the schools as inferior and harbored racist beliefs to remain in the school? However, as I discuss in Chapter Seven, the loss of so many students each year was beginning to cause strain on the school and its ability to serve the children who remained. Riverside was under-enrolled, while Easthaven in particular was bursting at the seams. Because of the loss of per-pupil dollars for more than 100 students each year who transferred, Riverside was hurting financially, and had been forced to cut course

offerings and lay off teachers and support staff. Thus, while the students were high-achieving, the schools in the Parkwood district were becoming increasingly unequal in terms of material resources, as a direct result of the school choice decisions of white parents who perceived Riverside to be inferior. In this way, the perceptions and ideologies of individual parents led to material differences across school that served mostly students of color compared to those that served more white students.

The “Stayers” and the Power of Whiteness in a Predominantly Non-white School

As discussed in Chapter Five, the Stayers who remained in Riverside often referenced their desire to not be racist when I asked why they chose not to transfer their child to Easthaven or Westview. These parents felt that by not transferring their children to one of the “Whiter” schools, they were distinguishing themselves from those who left. The Stayers tended to dismiss the decisions of those who left as racist, and embodied a sense of pride that they were different. The Stayers had a strong sense of themselves as morally superior to other, racist whites, and considered themselves to be racially tolerant and colorblind.

Additionally, many of these parents discussed wanting their children to attend racially diverse schools to prepare them for the real world, and felt that their experiences in Riverside would be beneficial to them, or in other words, provide them with a form of multicultural capital (Reay et.al, 2011). Stephanie, whose perspective was mirrored in the interviews with the other white parents at Riverside, told me that it was important to her that her children be exposed to diversity “Because it’s life. It’s the real world. You know, my kids are gonna be prepared when he goes to a job if he has a black supervisor or a Puerto Rican boss or an Asian...like whatever it is and, like, it’s not gonna be anything to him.”

Stephanie felt that the parents who chose to transfer their child or move to a more homogenous district were putting their children at a disadvantage, in part because they were raising them to recognize racial differences. She continued,

Some of the parents are gonna be...their kids are gonna have a rude awakening. Because I'm sorry, they're raising them to be prejudiced. They're raising them to be racist...they're raising their children to look at differences...you wanna go milky white then go to Kansas or wherever, but this is what the world is like now. These schools are representative of the world, Riverside is a perfect example of it. And I want my kids to know everybody and everything. I don't want them to grow up with prejudice.

In my initial interviews, I aimed to understand more deeply what really was different about these parents that led them to see their school choice decisions through a different lens that avoided some of the more common associations between school status and race. I wondered about their experiences in a school in which there was a relatively small percentage of white students, and whether this challenged their sense of racial comfort and privilege. I found, however, that while these parents said that they wanted their children to grow up without racial bias, and they were not working to physically separate and distinguish themselves and their children from students and parents of color, their decisions to stay were at least partly informed by the idea that there would be some benefit to their children.

Furthermore, as I discuss in the following section, these parents still engaged in behaviors that led to the maintenance of policies and practices that upheld their own privilege within the school. This was often done through the use of colorblind narratives to prevent the needs of students and families of color from being addressed. In turn, this served to perpetuate sociocultural exclusion of students and families of color within the school and district.

Colorblindness as a barrier to addressing racism.

As I have demonstrated in both Chapters Five and Six, white parents in Riverside were quick to discuss race and racism when it pertained to those who had left the community or opted out of the school. They acknowledged in their interviews that racism was a problem in this country that still needed to be addressed. However, it was clear as I probed more into their understandings of race that this was about as far as it went. Embodying common frames of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018), these parents believed that racism was a problem, in their minds, that existed only for a few less “evolved” whites in Parkwood and in the country overall, and was very much an attitude expressed by *individuals* rather than a structural phenomenon. Even as conversations about racism became more prominent across the country in the midst of Ferguson, Black Lives Matter, and the Trump election, the white parents at Riverside told me that they did not see these issues as a concern to them or those in their community. Instead, when conversations about race did come up, they tended to dismiss them as “political” issues that were likely to cause division in the community, and thus should be avoided.

One example of such an instance was in May of 2015, towards the end of the school year. One of the white Riverside parents who I had met at meetings, but who declined to be interviewed, made a public post on the community Facebook page about an incident that had upset her in her son’s classroom. His teacher, a white woman who I had met during my visits, had selected the song “Glory” by Common and John Legend, for their class to sing in the end-of-year assembly. The song had accompanied the release of the movie *Selma*, which chronicled the fight for voting rights for African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement, and had won a number of awards, including a Grammy and an Oscar. It carried an uplifting but honest message

about the ongoing fight for equal rights in the United States, drawing parallels from the Civil Rights Movement to present day with quotes like, “Resistance is us...that’s why Rosa sat on the bus. That’s why we walk through Ferguson with our hands up.”

It seemed, from my perspective, to be an opportunity for this teacher to bring a piece of pop culture into the classroom to spark a conversation about our past and present with the students, who were in the ninth grade. This parent, however, was outraged at the song selection. She wrote a lengthy post describing her shock that the teacher would select such “inappropriate” content for the children. She felt that her son was being indoctrinated to the teacher’s “political agenda.” I followed the thread for days, observing as other parents responded, often not with the same level of outrage that this parent expressed, but with understanding and commiseration nonetheless. This parent eventually contacted the teacher and Mr. Gallo, the principal, to express her feelings, and the song was immediately dropped from the program in favor of one that was less “controversial.”

This incident was just one of a number of times when I observed white parents in Riverside become angry when faced with what conversations about racial inequality. These findings mirror those of other researchers who have found similar trends of white parents avoiding, minimizing, or resisting conversations about the reality of racism, particularly around police violence (Hagerman, 2016, 2018; Underhill, 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Indeed, when faced with conversations about racism in the country and in Parkwood, white parents tended to get very uncomfortable, and often hostile. Many would argue that it is actually racist to discuss such topics, and that the true way to address racism is to stop talking about race (Leonardo & Porter, 2010; DiAngelo, 2018; Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Moreover, any efforts to create policies or programs to serve the needs of students of color in particular were often referred to as examples of ‘reverse racism.’ (DiAngelo, 2018; Cabrera, 2012; Norton & Sommers, 2011) In one such instance, I was sitting with a group of parents at a large, district-wide meeting, when a district politician, a black woman, made a comment about her desire to start an initiative in the school to address the academic needs of “black and brown boys.” A white Riverside mother who was sitting at my table turned around to her friend and whispered angrily, “How is that not racist?” She and the other parents at the table muttered comments about being “tired” of such conversations and that it was racist against white families and students to have targeted conversations and programs intended to serve students of particular racial backgrounds.

These short but powerful moments opened my eyes to the culture that was lurking behind the “utopian” exterior of Riverside’s racially diverse community. I learned that the white parents in this school were deeply committed to their identity as “colorblind” that had apparently led them to choose this diverse school for their children, but also fueled their strong opposition to conversations and policies that would go even remotely beyond a surface-level discussion of race to address more deep-seated issues in their community and school. They wanted their children to grow up without racial prejudice, but to them, that was equated with not “seeing race”- they also did not want their white children to be confronted with any meaningful conversations about their own privilege or modern-day racial power dynamics. What’s more, they saw any efforts to make progress towards serving the interests of students of color specifically as racist against them and their own children. In the remaining sections of the chapter, I present two key examples of the ways in which white parents used colorblind rhetoric to uphold and perpetuate the marginalization and exclusion of students and parents of color in Parkwood.

Teacher diversity.

As more children of color began to attend schools in Parkwood, some of their parents argued to the school that they should hire more teachers of color, as having same-race teachers is said to be beneficial for children of color (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016). At one meeting that I observed- the same meeting discussed in Chapter Five in which Mr. Gallo was presenting to elementary school parents about Riverside, a black father cited educational research on the importance of teacher diversity, and asked Mr. Gallo to consider making a concerted effort to increase the number of teachers of color in the school. I nodded along as he spoke- the racial mismatch between students at Riverside and the teachers and administrators had stuck out to me during my visits, and I was glad to see that parents were speaking up about the importance of this issue. Mr. Gallo responded politely, but told the father that his priority was to hire “the best candidate” regardless of race. The father was clearly dissatisfied with this response, but sat down and listened as other parents responded. Three different white parents from Riverside stood, each of them making statements that were aimed at defending the quality of teachers at Riverside, and arguing that race is less important than ensuring that the teachers in the school are qualified.

Stephanie, who I met for the first time at this meeting, was one of those who spoke, and appeared to be quite bothered by this father’s question. I followed up with her about the event during her interview. She explained her feelings during the meeting,

I got really really upset. Me and a couple of other parents. It’s like, really? So you’re giving a hard time to the person who is supporting, you know, your type. I hate using that, but you know, there’s no other way to describe what we’re talking about. So I’m like really? You know, I got really upset. Then I got home and I wrote Mr. Gallo an email. And I said you know what? Don’t even waste your time anymore. And I basically said, you know, screw these people. You go out of your way and you have to be abused. I was really upset for them after that meeting. I just wanted to punch him in his face.

It was clear that Stephanie was intensely bothered by the father's suggestion that the district should hire more teachers of color. I was surprised at her anger towards this man, however, who had not criticized Mr. Gallo at all- he simply had made a point about the benefits of a diverse teaching force, and advocated that the district do something to address the lack of teachers of color, particularly in light of the makeup of the student population. Stephanie seemed to be angry in part because this man, in her mind, should have been grateful to Mr. Gallo for his support of "his type" instead of asking him to do something differently to better serve the needs of students of color. I went on to ask Stephanie if she thought that having more diversity in the teaching staff would be a good thing more generally. She responded,

No, see that...that infuriates me. I'll be perfectly honest. When I go to these board meetings, and I go to every board meeting, and I'm very vocal. And I'm very active with the board. And it makes me...and other parents too. Hire the best person. Don't hire because somebody is...whatever. You hire the best person. Don't hire because...when you go to ethnic neighborhoods and you're recruiting...to me that's reverse discrimination. Because now you're discriminating against the best candidate. When you get applications, it doesn't say anything. You're taking the best application. So, how are you...and I feel like they're trying to do that. I feel like the board is, you know, maybe not hiring the best person just to satisfy people.

Stephanie then listed a small number of administrators of color who had been hired in the elementary schools across the district. "Just hired a new one. Again, maybe they are the best, maybe they're not. But they're just doing it to satisfy people....they wanna...I hate to use this word, and I don't mean it in a bad way...they're all liberal and like they wanna please everybody and this and that instead of doing what's right and the best possible person."

Hiring "the best person" was a common theme amongst parents and community members who were debating the article on Facebook as well, with an assumption that the "best" candidate would not be a teacher of color. Those making this argument, therefore, embodied an understanding that hiring teachers of color would mean hiring inferior candidates, and that the

knowledge, experience, and perspectives of teachers of color were not necessary or valuable to the educational experiences of students in Parkwood. Instead, like Stephanie, a number of respondents argued that making efforts to increase teacher diversity would mean that the district was discriminating and perpetuating racism against white candidates. A number of comments were from white parents who argued for the district to stop “focusing on race” because we are all the same. “Shame on them,” wrote another parent, arguing that exposing children to this sort of “racial tension” was not welcome in their school district.

A self-identified black mother made a number of thoughtful comments to explain, from her perspective, why having teachers of color was important. She also noted that this was something that parents of color in the district had discussed regularly and felt was lacking in the schools. She wrote that she wanted her own children to see themselves in their teachers and feel that they can grow up to be teachers as well. She had gone to school in another part of the country where she was the only black student in her grade, and had no teachers of color, and she wanted something different for her own children. In response, a white parent asked this woman why this was such a big deal, and declared that race should not matter, as it did not to her, so she could not understand the issue. A white man replied as well, saying that while he did not know what it was like to be a “minority,” the makeup of the teaching force is not something that should hold people of color “back” and that it was “narrow-minded” to concern themselves with the race of teachers in the schools.

The minimization of racism and the concerns and needs of people of color that were common in Parkwood reflect broader dominant ideologies about race and racism in the “post-racial” era (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Cabrera, 2012; Picca & Feagin, 2007; Spanierman & Cabrera, 2014). Furthermore, claims of ‘reverse racism,’ which came up repeatedly in my interviews as a

problem that white respondents said was of similar concern in today's society as was racism against people of color, are frequently touted by whites in response to efforts to implement race-conscious policies such as affirmative action, desegregation, or in the case of Parkwood, hiring teachers of color (Norton & Sommers, 2011).

Bullying of Muslim students.

In early 2017, just a few months after the election of Donald Trump as president and in the height of debate over the "travel ban", a controversy erupted surrounding one Parkwood school board member. This controversy followed conversations that were happening within the community over the possibility of establishing school holidays for two Muslim holy days, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. I observed a conversation on Facebook that followed an article posted by the local newspaper, covering a school board meeting from the day before in which the members had discussed changing the school calendar to incorporate the holidays. The head of the board at the time was Michael, a black man who I later interviewed, who was quoted in the article. Michael, as I later learned, had been approached by a group of Muslim parents to discuss the holidays, and had recently spoken with them at length about how to better serve the needs of their children in the schools. Michael made a comment during the meeting emphasizing his support of the school holiday to send a message to the Muslim community that they are valued and welcome, particularly in the current political context.

Michael later spoke with the local newspaper, noting that he had had conversations with a number of Muslim parents in the district who told him that their children had been the victims of bullying in the schools as well, and that recognizing this holiday would be a way that the district could signal their support to the Muslim community. By the time I saw the article covering the meeting and Michael's comments, it had sparked an outpour of backlash from the white

community. I saw a swath of strongly worded comments, at first expecting them to be addressing the bullying that these young students had experienced. Instead, however, they were directed at Michael. I recognized posts from many of the Riverside parents that I had interviewed who were citing their disgust and outrage that Michael could say such a "divisive" and "political" thing about their schools. Stephanie, who was outspoken against the transfer policy as well as efforts to promote the hiring of more teachers of color, was again one of the most vocal white parents who condemned Michael, along with many others. In a number of posts on the page, she encouraged other board members to speak out against Michael's "beliefs" that the community is "racist." She called Michael a "hateful asshole" and accused him of spreading "lies" about the district.

A number of residents of color responded in defense of Michael, and corroborated his statements about racism in the community. But still, the chorus of angry white parents, many of whom I knew from my visits to Riverside, dominated the conversation on the page for weeks. Susan, another one of my interviewees, made similar calls for Michael's resignation, saying that his comments were out of line. In a comment that exemplified yet another trope of colorblind racism, she wrote that her children had Muslim friends, and that they had never been bullied in the schools- an indication, from her "colorblind" point of view, that Michael was just "spewing B.S." about the treatment of Muslim students in the schools (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

What was particularly notable was the lack of attention in these comments to Michael's statement about Muslim children in the schools experiencing bullying. Instead, the mostly white parent backlash was centered on perceptions of Michael's statement as "divisive." In a school district that enrolled hundreds of Muslim students, I thought about what those parents and students must have felt as they had their experiences dismissed so quickly and harshly as false,

because they had never heard of such instances themselves. Further, the white parents were campaigning against this board member in a way that bordered on harassment, when his comments were simply aimed at recognizing the needs of students who were being marginalized in their schools. This behavior was particularly interesting when it came from Riverside parents who condemned racism in their interviews- they were very comfortable talking about the bias of the parents who fled the district or used the intra-district transfer policy to move to schools with higher proportions of white students- but when faced with allegations of racism that hit closer to home, they became staunchly defensive and angry.

In an interview with Michael, I asked him to describe the event from his perspective. He told me that the outrage was not surprising because he was breaking norms in the community around avoiding conversations about race and racism. Describing the reactions to his comments, he said,

Well...you know, that was seen as politicizing the issue. And it was also seen as a break from... their perception of what my role was as president of the [school board]. It was me expressing my First Amendment Rights about...a description of what was the political importance of this issue. But it was not me breaking any sort of policy or... but maybe tradition, certainly changing tradition. But my very presence changes the tradition, right. And to assert that, as a School Board member, that I'm not in a political... we're elected! It is inherently political. So they were wrong on the facts - on all three points, right. Just wrong. But that didn't stop them from trying to make a political point. Which is that I needed to be, sort of, put in my place.

Arguments like this—that talking about race was inappropriate “politicization” of issues that should not be discussed in public, was a common and powerful narrative in the community that was continuously used as a tool for shutting down residents like Michael and the Muslim parents who brought their concerns to him, from having their voices heard. Michael noted, like much of my data show, that open conversations about race and racism were taboo in the community as a whole, and that white residents in Parkwood had learned to speak in code to

avoid having “real conversations about race.” However, he felt the need to speak out rather than give in to this norm of avoiding these having difficult conversations after hearing about the experiences of Muslim students. “I believe that Muslim students should be able to show up at school as their unapologetic selves,” he said. “And I, as a school board member, should be able to speak up as my unapologetic self. And my community should be able to advocate for itself unapologetically. And that means... That’s a different politics. And they recognize that.”

He tied nostalgic statements about the “old Parkwood” that were common refrains among long-term white residents to Donald Trump’s slogan “Make America Great Again” that put forth a narrative that “things were great before and they’ve changed” because of changing racial demographics. Overt discussions of racism, according to Michael, caused white residents to feel anxious and threatened, as they had grown comfortable with the idea of racism as something that occurs at an individual level rather than “seeing things in terms of the systems that are in place.” Thus, if the conversation addressed racism in their own community, they would be responsible for addressing it. Michael’s points about whites in Parkwood being threatened by conversations about race that would challenge their own positions in the racial hierarchy was illustrative of Jenson’s (2005) discussion of racial fear partly derived from common fears among whites that they will be “seen” and recognized as having benefitted from and been complicit in the maintenance of structures of white supremacy and privilege.

Furthermore, the fact that this debate was happening in light of a broader context of political tension in the country around Donald Trump’s inauguration and efforts to ban the entry of residents from a number of Muslim countries was notable, and indicated that the statements of many of my interviewees that Parkwood was some sort of utopia that was immune to the controversies and tensions happening in broader society were not accurate. Michael told me that

while he was a democrat, most other members of the school board were republican, and his statement about respecting the needs of the Muslim community in this time were taken to be criticism of their preferred presidential candidate even though he did not make such a direct critical statement.

He went on to explain, as a number of others in the community had noted as well, that local republican leaders who had rarely seen their power challenged, were fearful that the demographic changes in Parkwood would soon lead to a shift in political leadership- something that I heard in other interviews as well. Challenging the political norm, and the conservative stronghold in the community in Parkwood was out of the ordinary, which is part of the reason why it had sparked such a strong negative reaction. Michael stated, “that political context recognizes, in many ways, that my willingness or my perception that it is safe to speak in these ways is an indication that the demographics have taken foot in the district and that’s going to have electoral consequences for them that they have been staving off for years.”

I asked Michael why he thought that so many white residents expressed that they were nostalgic for the “old Parkwood” and felt uncomfortable with addressing present-day racism in their community. I asked him to tell me what he thought they were wishing for or scared of losing. He responded, “Privilege. It’s just that simple, right? They haven’t had to share before and they’re not excited about sharing now. This idea that your understanding of how the world works is...under attack or at least it’s changing in a way that you don’t feel in control over. And...it’s threatening.” Again, Michael described how the actions of whites to prevent racial progress and direct discussions of race in the community were guided by their fears of losing their own power and privilege that they had long been accustomed to in the community, but which was now being threatened.

Conclusion: Preserving White Comfort and Power amid Demographic Change

Indeed, the findings from this chapter highlight the ways in which white residents of Parkwood- whether they were Leavers, Choosers, or Stayers, responded to demographic change in ways that seemed different from one another at first glance, but were actually quite similar in motivation and consequence. There was a clear sense that the increase in residents of color posed certain threats to whites in the community—whether for fear that their neighborhood and schools had or would decline, that they were less “safe,” that their comfort and way of life in their white community would be disrupted, that they would lose political and institutional power, or that the needs of people of color would be addressed in a way that would disrupt their colorblind identities. As a result, whites in the community acted on their emotions in an effort to preserve their privilege and control and diminish the “threat” posed to them by people of color who might challenge their power.

Perhaps most notable was the way in which white resistance to the changes in the population itself or to the efforts of residents of color to exert some influence over the policies and practices in the community and school that they paid taxes to access was continuously exerted in ways that emphasized colorblind, post-racial narratives. Moreover, the emphasis on colorblindness in race dialogue prioritized the comfort of whites over the needs of people of color (DiAngelo, 2018; Leonardo & Porter, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2018). This relates to the argument made by Leonardo & Porter (2010) that conditions of ‘safety’ for whites in conversations about race “maintains white comfort zones and becomes a symbolic form of violence experienced by people of color.” (p.139).

I argue, therefore, that not only did these narratives serve to obscure the reality of racism and the racial attitudes and ideologies of community members, but that they were also activated

as tools specifically used for the purpose of subverting racial progress, requiring residents of color to choose whether to remain silent or risk backlash from making their demands and wishes for full inclusion visible (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). The impact of these actions in relation to the institutional responses demographic changes in Parkwood and power dynamics between white residents and residents of color will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Institutional Mechanisms for Maintaining White Privilege and Power in Parkwood

In this chapter, I present findings on the institutional characteristics and mechanisms that supported the maintenance of white privilege and power in Parkwood. Here, I focus on the power structure in the community and district as well as the ways that policies and practices kept in place or implemented by school district leaders continuously served the interests of white parents and students over those of color, who comprised an increasing majority in the population. These findings contribute to an understanding of the ways that whiteness is continuously centered in institutions in the era of colorblindness, including in this context in which whites did not possess higher levels of socioeconomic status (as measured by income and education level), and do not make up a majority share of the population in the community and schools. Thus, I argue that whites in Parkwood, who often pushed in various ways to exert their control within the schools and district, derived specific and disproportionate power as a result of their racial status, which in turn led to further marginalization of parents and students of color. Building on Chapters Five and Six, this chapter details the final link in my discussion of the iterative relationship between the racialized meaning making of whites, and especially white parents in Parkwood—which influenced their actions and efforts to exert their racial privilege and power at the institutional level—and structures of racial stratification that emerged from the policies and practices that were upheld in the district to serve their interests.

In the first section of this chapter, I describe the power structures in the community and school district, which mostly of whites and were increasingly non-representative of the residential population and public school students that they served, who were less than 40 percent

white and less than 25 percent white respectively. Then in subsequent sections, I present a series of examples that illustrate the ways in which the white privilege and power were maintained in Parkwood through the institutionalization of two key school district policies that were kept in place as a result of the wishes and demands of white parents, even when some school and district leaders did not feel that they were particularly necessary or effective. The first is a policy I refer to as *boundary maintenance*, which includes the district's use of public school dollars to maintain a "residency office" tasked with ensuring that no students were attending the district schools who did not live within the district's catchment areas. The second is the *intra-district transfer policy*, which, as I have discussed in Chapters Five and Six, allowed parents to choose to transfer their child from their assigned secondary schools to one of the other two secondary school options in the district.

Finally, I describe two additional themes that were revealed in my data and illustrated how the interests of whites in the community were upheld in the district through practices and narratives that led to more sociocultural forms of marginalization of students of color. Overall, the findings from this chapter demonstrate that despite the decline in the white population in the community and schools in Parkwood, white parents and residents had substantially more power than those of color in influencing policy and practices within the school district.

White Power Structures in Parkwood

One of my first observations during my time spent in Parkwood, particularly during my observations at district meetings and visits to the schools, was that those who held positions of power—including teachers, administrators, and school board members—remained mostly white despite the fact that whites no longer made up a majority in the residential and student populations. This trend of the power structures being out of step with community demographics

is not abnormal in cases of suburban demographic change, and presents concerns over whose interests are being served (McCarthy, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Holme, Diem & Welton, 2014).

In Riverside, Easthaven, and Westview combined, all staff members of color, including teachers, made up just over ten percent of the total population, while students of color comprised nearly 80 percent of the total student body in all secondary schools. While all of the parents of color I interviewed said that when it came to hiring teachers, the first priority should be finding someone who is “qualified,” most also noted that they would like to see more diversity in the teaching force. As Olivia, a black mother whose child attended Riverside stated, “It’s not as diverse as I would expect. Not that diversity always has to do with everything, but I think it would be nice for the children to see themselves reflected in maybe one or two.”

Towards the later stages of my data collection process, the district was under increased pressure to address the racial mismatch between students, staff, and administrators in the Parkwood schools at the request of some of the more vocal parents of color in the community. At the elementary school level in particular, some school leaders spoke out in support of this goal and stated that they would make a targeted effort to adjust their hiring practices accordingly. At the high school and district levels, the leadership was less responsive to the requests of parents of color and made no statements of commitment to change their hiring practices.

When I asked administrators whether they were implementing efforts to recruit more teachers of color given that nearly 90 percent of teachers were white in a district that was less than 25 percent white, the superintendent, Dr. Snider and Mr. Gallo both told me that while they recognized the value of having a diverse teaching force and considered it a worthy goal, it was challenging for them to implement changes in the district fast enough to “keep up” with the rapid

changes in the demographics of the student body, particularly because there was very little teacher turnover in Parkwood. They also said that they simply did not receive as many applications for teaching positions from people of color, and that their top priority was to hire the “best” candidates, reflecting a race-neutral, colorblind approach that mirrored the dominant narratives I observed in Parkwood throughout my time there.

While the teachers in Parkwood were predominantly white women, nearly all administrators at the district and school levels were white men. The district administration included three assistant superintendents, all of whom were white men, as was Dr. Snider, the head superintendent. Similarly, each of the principals at the Westview, Easthaven, and Riverside middle and high schools were white—two out of the three were men. Eight of the ten elementary schools were led by white principals; one elementary school principal was black, and one was Latina.

The makeup of the district’s school board changed slightly following elections over the time that I spent conducting research in Parkwood. However, there were never more than two members of color out of a total of nine on the board at any given time. I learned that a number of the school board members in Parkwood—again, mostly white men—had served for many years, and were long-time, retired residents whose children had long since graduated from the local schools. Through some of the district-level interviews conducted during the earlier study I worked on, our team learned that this was part of an institutional culture in Parkwood overall- in which older white men in particular who were well-connected with one another and with other long established Parkwood residents held a number of powerful political positions and seats on local governing boards, including the school board.

Daniel, the local business owner who had grown up in Parkwood, called this group of powerful white men the “old guard.” These men, he said, often acted together to maintain policies and practices that served the interests of long-time white residents- such as zoning policies that restricted multi-family homes and the construction of rental properties, and hiring school leaders from within the district who were already part of the white, mostly male, establishment. Daniel explained these powerful Parkwood leaders “think we need to keep [Parkwood] like it was in 1950-1960...you still get like, the guys that think power and authority; controlling people through jobs, through local jobs or through politics is the way the show should be run.”

Dr. Stevens, who was the Parkwood superintendent at the time of his interview, shed more light on this trend. He noted that the school board was not reflective of the district population, explaining, “You would see that the power structure is resistant to change and it probably takes two generations for elected officials to reflect their community. It doesn’t happen when the community changes. People hold onto power...who wants to give up power?”

This network of political insiders from the “old guard” worked together and sometimes campaigned together, and with the support of many of the most vocal and engaged white community members, helped the white community overall to maintain institutional control as the population changed. Thus, given that the power structure in Parkwood had not changed much in spite of the transformation of the residential population over the past few decades, it is perhaps not surprising that the institutional policies and practices within schools also continued to uphold and preserve whiteness in various ways.

Boundary Maintenance via Parkwood’s Suburban “Border Patrol”

In this section, I discuss a Parkwood school district policy that was perhaps the strongest example of how policies were informed by the racial fears and ideologies expressed by white residents in response to demographic changes in the community and schools. In response to demand from the community based on what was perceived as a growing problem, the Parkwood school board established a district-wide residency office in 2002 to enforce and oversee adherence to the school residency policies. The primary purpose of this office was to ensure that all students attending their schools lived in “legal housing” within the district boundary lines. Many residents, especially long-time white community members and parents, had become increasingly concerned that students were residing in “illegal apartments” that were not in compliance with single-family zoning restrictions, or were entering Parkwood from outside districts, particularly those in the neighboring city. This concern had become pronounced in response to increasing numbers of families of color moving in to the community, and was something that I observed repeatedly at school and district meetings and in Facebook conversations.

As part of the prior study that I worked on with our research team studying the impact of demographic change on schools and districts including Parkwood, our team conducted a series of interviews with administrators at the district level, many of which are referenced in this chapter. One such interview was with Dr. Snider, who at the time was the district’s Assistant Superintendent for Administration and is now the district-wide superintendent. When asked about the reason that the district created the residency office in Parkwood, Dr. Snider explained that there was strong community demand and support from the school board. When asked, he elaborated to explain who he meant when he referenced the community demand:

Some long-time [Parkwood] residents are having a hard time coming to grips with the changing demographics of the community, and when people who used to live here you know, 25 years ago, you would see all these white faces...and then that changes, you know? It's like, did my community change or are these people here illegally? Do they live here?

At the time of my data collection and during the previous study, the residency office was led by Mr. DeLuca, a retired police detective whose job consisted of conducting extensive investigations on children and families who were suspected to be living outside of the district and crossing the boundary line each day to attend one of Parkwood's schools. In prior years, the district had employed only one part-time staff person within the residency office. However, due to increasing demand from the public, the school board hired Mr. DeLuca and a full-time assistant specifically to work on residency issues. Mr. DeLuca also explained that he regularly hired part-time contractors to assist with investigations. The work of the residency office was additionally supported by an advisory council made up of residents, board members, school leaders, and local elected officials. This advisory council was tasked with assisting investigations and holding annual meetings in which residents could voice their concerns over residency issues in the community. The district also maintained a hotline, advertised on its website, that residents could use to report children they thought may be attending Parkwood schools from outside of the district. On the website itself, in meetings, and in newspaper articles, students who did not live with their parents or legal guardians within the district boundaries were referred to as "illegal students."

Dr. Snider explained that Parkwood's residency process was more intensive than in other districts in the county, particularly because of its proximity to the nearby city. "The schools in [Parkwood] are considered more desirable and people who may live five miles away might not be entitled to come here," he said. In the previous district that he worked in, which was

surrounded by mostly white neighboring districts, Dr. Snider said that residency issues were not of much concern. He went on to explain that Parkwood's policies are stricter than in other districts as well. For instance, children were not permitted to stay with relatives who live in the community if their parents did not have a home there.

The district required that parents prove their residency by submitting extensive paperwork in grades three, seven, ten, and eleven, which was reviewed by Mr. DeLuca and his administrative staff. Children of parents who did not submit the paperwork or turned in incomplete paperwork would receive follow-up requests, and if they were unable to produce the necessary documents, an investigation was opened. There were other possibilities to prompt an investigation as well, such as tips from community members through the hotline or from a teacher or counselor in the schools, which, according to Mr. DeLuca, was the most common way that the residency office was alerted to students who actually did not live "legally" in the district. The residency office also required teachers to assign a writing task in the beginning of each school year asking students to describe what they did over the summer as a way to look for clues about where students lived and flag any that seemed "suspicious." In this way, even teachers in Parkwood participated in boundary maintenance efforts by surveilling and policing students through the curriculum. Indeed, the policing of students and families of color who were viewed with suspicion as to whether they "belonged" in the changing Parkwood schools involved a network of mostly white "enforcers," from district and school administrators, to teachers and counselors as well as neighbors and parents.

Initial steps taken by the district when they suspected that a student was violating the residency policy involved following and videotaping children going home from school to see if they walked to a local residence or took a bus outside of the district. Mr. DeLuca also conducted

home visits to observe the set up and determine whether the child appeared to live there.

According to Mr. DeLuca, when conducting home visits, he would request to see the child's belongings and their bedroom to determine if it was set up for a child of their age. He recalled one home visit that raised his suspicion:

Somebody showed me a bedroom, white lacquer furniture filled with teddy bears. The person was obviously into collecting teddy bears. This was supposed to be like, I think it was a thirteen year old boy. Ok? That was a red flag. You know if it was supposed to be girl, ok, fine, but a thirteen year old boy isn't gonna sleep in a room filled with teddy bears.

The initial stage of the residency determination process involved a series of three such invasive home visits. The next step in the process, then, was to open a full investigation, which involved surveilling the home listed on a student's school registration documents and running background checks to identify whether the parent or guardian listed had any other addresses on file, which would also be surveilled. Mr. DeLuca noted that it was important to hire sub-contractors to conduct the surveillance because if he were to do it himself, the parents may recognize him. The surveillance process consisted of three separate secretive visits to student's homes, which were videotaped as evidence. In a quote that highlighted the extent to which he viewed these investigations as a process of catching criminals—in this case, parents who, if they were “guilty”, simply wanted to provide their children with better educational opportunities—Mr. DeLuca said that he provided the sub-contractors conducting these investigations with “blacked out vans...that would just blend in...just a very bland vehicle in the neighborhood” as well as “video surveillance equipment...because some of these people are really very street savvy.”

When Mr. DeLuca and the residency advisory council had made a final determination as to a student's status in the district, they would then hold a hearing to present their decision and

findings to the family. As part of the earlier research project, members of our research team were invited to attend a residency hearing in late September of one year. The hearing was held for a family with three children attending schools in Parkwood. Their aunt, Gail, who served as their guardian, shared that the children had moved to live with her because their parents divorced and their mother was now working a job as a home health aide that required her to live with her employer. Gail said that the children had previously lacked stability in their home life after having to move around to different states and start new schools repeatedly.

The children had been attending Parkwood schools since the previous year, and were thriving. Gail had recently moved, but checked to ensure before buying her home that the children would be able to stay in their current schools. She noted during the hearing that her real estate agent assured her that the home was within the boundaries of the Parkwood district. Dr. Snider and Mr. DeLuca pointed to a map, which indicated that while other homes on her same street were in fact, part of the district, her house was not.

Gail's oldest niece had just begun her senior year of high school, and Gail specifically wanted to stay within the district so she would not have to change schools in her final year. She pleading with Dr. Snider and his team,

I really don't want to move...they're doing well at that school, they've been doing so many things. The 11th grader just joined the dancing team and everything. The senior just took her yearbook photos. For me to take her now and say I'm moving you to another school...plus that doesn't look good on her resume for her to go to college. She has so many schools that they have been...they have been going through so much stuff, these kids.

Dr. Snider replied that Maria could request with the school principal that the 12th grader be allowed to finish out her senior year of high school. However, the younger children, including one in 11th grade, would be required to leave the district. "This is the map of our district, and it's

pretty clear they don't live here...we still have to look at the property, where it is, and where the taxes go," he said.

In a follow-up interview, Dr. Snider elaborated on the issue of taxes. He noted that the residency office was important to members of the community- both parents and older residents- because they wanted to ensure that their property tax dollars were serving children who lived within the district boundary lines. He said, "The community is very supportive of the residency efforts because people who...you know [Parkwood's] property taxes are high and people don't like seeing people going to their schools who aren't taxpayers."

This was a common refrain among parents in Parkwood that I heard during my observations. Parents—most of whom were white—regularly made statements about how their taxes were too high, and that this was a result of students attending the schools illegally. In an interview with Dianne, a white Westview parent who had attended some meetings of the residency committee, she noted that residents and parents were very concerned that their taxes might be used to educate children who did not live in Parkwood, and that parents were concerned that some families were "taking advantage" of their hard-earned money.

Dr. Snider explained that the district holds public forums each year to discuss residency issues, and attendees from the public are invited to speak. The meetings were very well-attended by residents who came to voice their concerns over the amount of students that they believed to be in the district illegally. In fact, Dianne noted that she was taken aback by the size of the crowd at a forum that she had recently attended. She noted, "There were so many community members. It was a giant meeting. I'd never gone to a meeting where there were so many people."

While he was generally supportive of the efforts to address these residency concerns, Dr. Snider recognized that many reports and statements made at the public meetings from residents

and parents in the district were often based on assumptions that certain families do not belong or live in the district. He tied this to the demographic changes, and said that white parents and long-time residents saw children of the color in the district and assumed that they did not belong. He said, “Now it’s perception, and it’s hard to break people’s perceptions. When they see a lot of minority students coming to and from their schools they’re very quick to make the assumption that they don’t live here when in fact they do.”

Mr. DeLuca echoed this, and said that he would get a number of reports from residents who suspected that people they saw walking down the street, who ended up being their neighbors, were there “illegally.” “People were thinking...they’re not like me so therefore they don’t live here,” he said.

Mr. DeLuca also noted that he believed that if the population in Parkwood was still made up mostly of white residents, that his office would not exist. “It’s a cultural change,” he said.

Whenever you introduce another culture, you can’t always guarantee acceptance. What’s happened is now with people coming in that are looked upon as minorities whether they’re from the Middle East or they’re African American, or they’re from Korea, there is a thought that ‘they’re here, they’re gonna help their relatives come to this country and establish themselves’ and there are people here that just won’t accept that. That’s what it comes down to.

The meetings of the residency council were also covered by local media outlets, which concerned Dr. Snider in the past because of the tendency of parents and other residents to spread rumors and exaggerate the extent of the residency “problems” in the district when they made public statements. “They’ll say things like, ‘There are hundreds of kids in our schools who don’t live here,’ he said, which is not the case. I heard one such rumor during my interview with Jennifer, the white parent whose children were assigned to Riverside, but who chose to transfer them to Easthaven after visiting Riverside for a district-wide event and being turned off by the

students she met and the “chaos” she described in the building. Jennifer relayed what she had heard about residency issues in the district,

So, apparently this detective followed kids around for a couple of months...he would get a tip from somebody or whatever and he'd follow these kids around and the rumor was he presented to the [Riverside] principal...a list of like 300 kids that didn't live in the district. They lived in [the city] and were renting addresses here, meaning they pay somebody with a [Parkwood] address to use their address for like \$200 a month. That's another reason my kids don't go to school in that part of the district, because if I wanted to have my kids in school with kids from [the city], I would have stayed in [the city].

While the district did investigate a number of children each year, that number was nowhere near 300 children. Shortly after I interviewed Jennifer in, the district reported that a total of 48 students were investigated that school year at all elementary, middle and high schools, which have a combined total of approximately 10,000 students. Of those 48 students who went through the rigorous investigation process, 37 were found to be homeless, and were permitted to stay in their schools. The remaining 11 students, five of whom were attending one of the three high schools, were removed from the district. Despite the low number of students who were actually found to be in violation of the residency policy, perceptions from white community members, which I heard repeatedly in my interviews and observations both in meetings and on Facebook, was that there were hundreds of students attending the schools illegally and driving up the burden on local taxpayers.

When asked about the cost-benefit analysis for the residency efforts, and whether the district conducted investigations as a way to save money for the schools, Dr. Snider noted that it was difficult to assess whether the money they saved when students were forced to leave the district was worth the cost of their efforts. He estimated that the district spent approximately \$100,000 per year for Mr. DeLuca's salary, which, in addition to the cost of hiring subcontractors who help to conduct the investigations, and other costs associated with the work

of the residency office, added up to close to \$300,000 per year. Thus, in order to be a money-saving operation, at least 23 students would have to be removed each year in order for the district to “save” as much as \$300,000 on per-pupil spending (around \$13,000 per student at the time the data were collected).

Moreover, Dr. Snider explained that removing one student did not mean that the district actually saved the full per-pupil allocation, because many costs were allocated to building-wide services and salaries for staff that would not be eliminated after removing a few students from the schools. He explained, “You can’t just take \$13,000 times the number of students and say that’s how much we saved because the bottom line is, you’re spending the money anyway. Even though you’ve put these kids out, you didn’t reduce your staff, ‘cause the kids are in different grades and in different schools.”

Dianne had followed the investigations during the year that I interviewed her. She noted that the efforts of the district to investigate suspected students was out of line with the extent of the “problem” of out of district students attending the schools. She said,

They investigated...how many did they investigate? I can’t remember but it was like a dozen or twenty investigations and there were only three that were the real problem. I thought for those three kids that is a lot of effort for that little return...I don’t know why it has to have so many hoops anyway... You could educate several children for...several illegal children and you know probably still come out spending less.

Dianne’s feelings were not reflected in the dominant ideology of the community on this issues, however. Whether or not the residency investigations were an effective use of the school district’s taxpayer dollars, white parents and community members in particular continued to express their concerns that their tax dollars were going to serve students who did not belong in the district. In response, the district continued to devote substantial time, resources, and attention to residency issues as the district population became more racially diverse and the white

population continued to shrink. Mr. DeLuca believed that, in part, the efforts of the residency office helped white community members and parents feel as though they were in control of the changing district, and these residents devoted substantial effort to lobbying the school board and administrators to continue to implement stricter residency policies. He explained, “People are reluctant to give up control,” he said. “They feel if they lose that, they lose control...and they control it because they set the policy.”

Thus, by all accounts based on our interviews, the residency office and its policies were going nowhere in the foreseeable future, if for no other reason than to assuage the fears of the white community to demographic change and what was viewed as violations and encroachment on what rightfully belonged to them because of the taxes and home prices they paid to live there. As Mr. Deluca noted, “the whole concept of identity and how important boundaries are... Like the boundaries really matter to people.” And as the population in Parkwood continued to look less and less like it had in previous decades, the emphasis on enforcing boundaries had become a major topic of discussion in local politics. This culture of emphasizing boundaries in a time of demographic change was critically important to the way that white residents made sense of who belonged in their community and who had a right to attend the local schools—which was very much tied to race. And in response, the district’s leadership was willing to devote considerable time and money to helping to ensure that their sense of control and comfort was maintained.

Maintaining the Transfer Policy to Keep White Parents in Parkwood Schools

Like the border patrol that was enacted in response to demographic changes in the community and perceptions of who belonged and who did not, the intra-district transfer policy, as discussed in earlier chapters, was another unique feature of the Parkwood school district that became a way for white parents to feel as though they were in control during a time in which

their racial privilege was perceived to be threatened. As explained in Chapter Four, the policy had been in place since the 1960s, but had, as Mr. Gallo noted, “never been an issue until the community has become a lot more diversified.”

A number of parents and administrators at Riverside noted that they felt that the transfer policy should no longer be in place because the school was now under-enrolled and losing funding as a result of the large number of children who exited the school each year. The exodus of students from Riverside was putting more and more strain on the school, and on Mr. Gallo in particular. In an interview on a cold January day, just before he received the results of the transfer requests for that year, I noticed immediately that he was not his normal jovial self. He said that he was feeling very stressed as he waited for the list of students who would be transferring. He had worked hard the year before – giving tours, holding meetings, and visiting feeder schools in an effort to convince parents whose children were assigned to Riverside that it was a safe and high-performing school. “It’s very hard to sleep at night right now,” he said. “You know, the more I see this information, it’s like I worry about the school and the building, the teachers and the kids.”

When the results from the transfer requests came in, Mr. Gallo was frustrated to learn that the number of students opting out of Riverside was similar to previous years, “We still had about 120 kids transfer out of the school,” he said. “Regardless of my efforts in the past 3 years, we’re still not attracting some of those kids.” He felt that his efforts couldn’t overcome the perception that the white community members and parents had about the school because the majority of students were black and Latinx, and that no matter what he did to shift the outside perception of the school, it wasn’t enough to change parents’ behaviors. He noted that the

transfer policy was the real problem—because the policy existed, parents were able to act on their perceptions in a way that was making it difficult for him to provide for his school.

Mr. Gallo was concerned that he may have to eliminate a number of clubs and elective classes in the coming school year because fewer students would be attending, resulting in the school having fewer options to offer their students. Easthaven, on the other hand, was filled to capacity, and was adding, rather than cutting classes. Mr. Gallo noted that at a recent district-level meeting of school leaders, “We just finished staffing conversations and every building is kind of reducing, reducing, reducing and [Easthaven] is asking for more sections.”

He was also worried that because of the Riverside’s poor reputation when compared to Easthaven, the more involved parents, whose children tended to perform better on state tests, would increasingly choose to transfer their children. He had already noticed a trend that students who were higher achieving were more likely to be transferred, including a small but increasing number of black and Asian students. As a result, he feared that over time, Riverside’s test scores would decline in relation to those of Easthaven, which would add additional justification for parents to use the transfer policy. He said, “Parents are gonna see that and are just gonna say whoa wait a second you know maybe [Easthaven] is a better school and we should send our kids to [Easthaven]. I’m worried about the transfer policy really...its already impacting us, but impacting us even more where our population’s gonna see a steady decline. “

I asked Mr. Gallo and a number of parents if they thought the transfer policy would ever be eliminated. Despite the negative impact on Riverside and overcrowding at Easthaven, each respondent replied that this was highly unlikely because those in power did not want to upset white parents who would potentially leave the district if they could not transfer their children. In the past, any mention of limiting or eliminating the policy had been met with strong resistance

from white parents who transferred to Easthaven. Mr. Gallo said that while the school board and district leadership were aware of the impact on Riverside, they felt pressure from the community to keep things the way they were.

I think deep down inside they know. They know the issues. Like I said it's just who is gonna have enough courage to tackle it with the community? Do families move out because they don't want to change their ways? Do they go more...do they go to non public schools because they don't want to send their kids to a school that's heavily minority based? There has not been one board member who would stand up, and I don't think there ever will be, to say we need to reexamine this policy. I hope there is one time in the future that someone is powerful enough to say that. But you know, they get voted in by their constituents, and I'm sure that they're worried also about what people would say.

Similarly, Theresa, one of the long-time residents of Parkwood who sent her children to Riverside, told me, "I think if they do away with it, people will...more people would move out. More white people would move out. I think they're trying to keep as many here...I feel that they have the transfer policy so that more of the white people would stay." Mr. Palermo, the principal at Riverside High, agreed that the school board would not eliminate the policy because "they want to give people the freedom of choice of schools." This was something that had been a topic of conversation historically among local town leaders as well, who did not want the policy eliminated because they were concerned that it would lead to more white flight and, as a result, declining home values, even though people of color in the community had higher income levels and median home values, on average, than white residents.

At the end of my data collection in Parkwood, the question of whether to amend or eliminate the transfer policy actually gained traction with the Parkwood school board. Interestingly, however, the board decided to consider potential changes because of the frustration of parents at Easthaven, the "whiter" school, who said that the building was becoming too overcrowded, rather than because of the impact on Riverside. In response, the board convened a

committee of parents who they selected to serve as advisors on this issue. These parents met with the board during a series of meetings in which they shared their perspectives and represented the concerns of other parents in the community.

I observed during these meetings that the majority of parents convened on the committee were white. Of about twenty parents on the committee, only three were parents of color. The parents formed sub-committees based on their opinions regarding the policy, and wrote joint reports outlining their recommended changes (or lack thereof) to the policy. During the meetings themselves, parents spoke passionately about their interest in maintaining, or to a lesser extent, amending the transfer policy. A number of white parents who were assigned to Riverside and transferred to Easthaven became particularly emotional and angry that the board was even considering a change. Carrie, a white parent whose children were assigned to Easthaven and who served on the committee, explained during an interview that these parents would make statements about how they had a right to choose the school they wanted their children to attend because they were “taxpayers.” She scoffed and said “We're all taxpayers, we all ... you know...we have to do what's best for the kids.”

Carrie felt that the parents who wanted to maintain the transfer policy were monopolizing time during the meetings to make their case over fears that if the policy was eliminated, their children would be reassigned to Riverside. She also noted, and I observed, that the transfer parents, aka the Choosers, claimed that the real problem of concern was that too many “non-residents” were attending the schools. This, they argued, was the reason that Easthaven was overcrowded—not because of the transfer students who were children of taxpayers. Claire, a white Westview parent who was on the advisory committee as well, said that the arguments about “illegal students” were just a way for the transfer parents to avoid saying the truth—which

is that they did not want their children to attend Riverside because of the racial demographics of the student body. She said, “I think it allows people to get away with it in a way that they also don't even have to ... They don't have to verbalize it.”

In this way, the Choosers who feared that their children may be forced to attend Riverside, which they saw as inferior to Easthaven, placed blame on others—namely the students they assumed to be “illegal.” The perceptions that the district was being overrun with students from outside communities, particularly the nearby city then became a central part of the conversation in the meetings that were intended to focus on revising the transfer policy. The concerns faced by Riverside due to its declining enrollment and loss of funding as a result, were given very little attention. In the end, the transfer policy was maintained with no significant changes.

Thus, although the transfer policy was leading to increased stratification between schools, the consensus among those that I interviewed was that it was institutionalized as a permanent fixture of district policy. Those in power within the district and at the community level, who were mostly white, were committed to maintaining the policy as a way to placate white parents who they feared would leave if they no longer had the ability to choose the school they wanted for their children. The preservation of this policy despite its impact and impracticality was yet another clear example of the political power and perceived value that white parents and residents held in this district from the perspective of the white power structure, who prioritized their interests in an effort to keep them from leaving the community.

Emphasis on Control and Discipline at Riverside

In this section, I discuss the practices of school leaders in Riverside that were enacted in response to negative perceptions of the school among white residents and parents in the

community in light of the increasing enrollment of students of color. Specifically, I found that leaders at Riverside, particularly Mr. Gallo, were under pressure to project an image that the school was orderly and under control to the white community in order to avoid exacerbating the negative reputation of the school. Thus, Mr. Gallo instituted a “no-nonsense” approach in managing student behavior on Riverside’s campus.

As discussed in previous chapters, Riverside had a reputation for being lower-performing and having more problems with safety and discipline than Easthaven and Westview. While there was no evidence that this reputation was warranted, the perception that Riverside was a disorderly and unsafe school was widespread among parents in the community.

As a result of the school’s location on a relatively busy street in Parkwood, making it more visible to the community, it was not uncommon for negative rumors about the school to spread based on residents driving by and being alarmed when they saw students congregating in the area outside of the school. Mr. Gallo was very cognizant of this, and explained that because many of the students were black and Hispanic, white residents associated their normal teenage behavior with disorder and deviance. Mr. Gallo, for instance, said about these white residents,

The reality is they see during dismissal large groups of kids walking together, because ...you know middle schoolers they walk together. They’re high minority, you know largely African American males and female. They see this school and the kids that are leaving appear to be gang bangers, like their pants are low, and they’re loud, they’re playing, they’re running after each other because they’re 7th and 8th grade boys with a lot of energy, hitting each other.

Mr. Gallo felt pressure to improve the reputation of Riverside that was fueled by the racialized perceptions of white parents and residents, and expressed that school dismissal was a stressful time due to concerns over how the students would be viewed as they walked home or went to meet their parents in the parking lot. To manage the negative perceptions of the school,

Mr. Gallo and the assistant principals would stand outside every day at dismissal to usher students off campus as quickly as possible. He explained that it was extremely important that the students disperse from the school property as quickly as possible,

We dismiss at 2:45 so we clear kids out so kids are not hanging out. You know we go outside and say you've got 5-10 minutes and then you gotta leave and we start to usher them away. So the fact that kids aren't hanging out in front of the building sends an image to the community that it's an orderly place. It's very important...image and perception are essential. It's critical.

A number of Riverside parents made similar statements about the importance of managing how students from Riverside were viewed when they left the school together, and said that the other two schools did not have the same issues. Stephanie, for example, shared that Easthaven and Westview had open lunch policies for the older students, so students who drove could leave campus and go to one of the nearby restaurants. Easthaven has had issues with neighbors complaining about students speeding through the neighborhoods during this time. However, Stephanie explained that the reputation of the school was not affected in the same way that it would have been if they were Riverside students. Riverside High, was the only school of the three did not allow students to leave campus during the day.

Thus, I learned through my interviews that the Riverside leaders felt that they needed to project an image of order and control to those in the community as a way of maintaining the school's reputation, which was very much tied to the race of students in the building. At Easthaven, the predominantly white student body was given more freedom, and the school did not suffer from the same fragile image in the community that required careful protection at Riverside. At Riverside, students were viewed through a lens that imposed negative assumptions about their character and interpreted typical teenage behavior as deviant and deficient. When school leaders, community members, and parents alike spoke about the students in Riverside, a

common theme was that they required structure, discipline, and control to ensure that the young people stayed in line.

Mr. Gallo had spent his time since becoming principal trying to turn the reputation of Parkwood around. He explained that part of his strategy was to encourage the students to be aware of their actions within and outside of the school building so that they could be seen in a positive light by the community, “We tell the kids, we said, ‘Do you know what image you present to this building, how you portray the building when you do this?’ We’re trying to educate the students that their actions in the community, how they behave in the community really has a direct influence on how people feel about our school.”

Cynthia, a black Riverside mother, recognized this and expressed her sadness and frustration about the impact that the negative assumptions and surveillance had on Riverside students simply because the predominantly black and Latinx population alarmed white residents. She said, “I just think it's...it's awful that they get ... the kids get so much more of a bad rap everything they do. It's like a microscope on them. Or not a microscope, it's like magnified what they do.” Based on the conversations around Riverside’s “image” and the need for structure and control, it was clear to me that these students were, in a sense, deprived of their ability to express themselves fully as young people free of the gaze of others, namely, whites.

While most of the parents of color that I interviewed described having a positive experience in Riverside overall, for one black father in particular, the pressure placed on the school to adhere to the expectations of white residents, and what he considered to be an over-emphasis on discipline as a result, was enough to motivate him to choose a different school for his son. Michael, the former district board member who had spoken out about bullying of Muslim students in the district, told me that he chose to transfer his son out of Riverside and into

Easthaven. I initially wondered if the rumors about Riverside being lower quality and more dangerous than the other schools had been his motivation for moving his son. His reason was quite different, however, from many of the white parents who fled. He believed, like many others, that Riverside was a good school and that it had an undeserved reputation because of its high proportion of black and Latinx students.

Michael said that he made the difficult decision to transfer his son to Easthaven because of a perception within the black community that “there’s too much of a focus on behavior” in Riverside. He explained that members of the community, including those in his own family, had reported disproportionate disciplinary practices and punishments in the school for things like “talking back to authority figures or engaging in regular teenage/pre-teen kinds of behavior.” Michael noted that if there were more serious concerns with behavior, such as violence, weapons, or drugs, the responses by Riverside administration would be more warranted- but that students were being disproportionately punished for behaviors that may not otherwise be considered serious. “Kids of color are interpreted differently,” he told me. He continued to explain that his son is tall for his age, standing at over six feet as a ninth grader. He also received special education services and sometimes had difficulty controlling his actions in a way that Michael feared would possibly be misinterpreted because of his size and race.

Michael felt, therefore, that using the transfer policy was the best decision for his son in an effort to avoid potentially harmful disciplinary action in Riverside. Data on suspension rates by race across the schools in the district give some validity to Michael’s statements. Black students in Easthaven were about two times more likely to be suspended from school than white students- still a disproportionate number, but less so than in Riverside, where black students were

suspended at about five times the rate of white students. In Westview, no notable difference between black and white suspension rates was reported.

As I noted in Chapter Five, white Riverside parents who defended the school's reputation also often attributed the "quality" and safety of Riverside as being a function of Mr. Gallo's "no-nonsense" leadership style and strength as a disciplinarian. When Mr. Gallo announced that he would be leaving Riverside to take a position as a central administrator in a nearby school district, of course, the parents who loved him were sad to see him go. What was more notable was that a number of white parents declared that they would no longer want to send their children to Riverside because Mr. Gallo would not be there.

Nancy, the white Riverside parent who also worked in the school, said that she was not concerned because she spent all day in the building and knew the students were well-behaved-but that a number of white parents were concerned that the school would become chaotic without Mr. Gallo there to "run a tight ship." She told me that she had received calls in the office from concerned parents; "We had some parents, it was funny, they were calling, 'I'm concerned, I'm scared now, I don't know if I want to send 'em. It's interesting... I guess there's some kind of assumption he was holding it together somehow and something's wrong without him.'" In other words, my data suggest that Mr. Gallo's role in maintaining that highly controlled environment through strict disciplinary policies and practices was critical to white parents' feelings of comfort and safety in the school.

Colorblind Leadership and Practices

In another example of how the practices of administrators in Parkwood upheld the interests of white parents, in this section, I discuss the ways in which school and district leaders upheld the dominant ideologies and narratives of colorblindness that were central to the meaning

making and privilege of white parents in the context of this racially diverse school district. Policies and practices implemented at the school and district level were done so through a colorblind lens- race was rarely, if ever, address in a more that superficial way. Riverside, for instance, had created a program to address bullying within the school, but did not specifically address race and racism beyond condemning “hate speech.”

However, the school considered themselves to be very thoughtful and proactive about ensuring that all students felt welcome. Administrators and teachers often talked about the student diversity as a strength; using terms like “melting pot” to describe the school and its culture in a utopian sense. When asked whether teachers and school leaders discussed issues of race with their students, responses most often referenced “international nights” or stories about how students shared their cultures through class discussions about different holidays or types of food- but that deeper conversations about racism and inequity affecting students, the school, and the Parkwood community, were largely absent.

Furthermore, I found that the way that school and district leaders managed the push-back from white parents on discussions of race on the rare occasions that such conversations were brought up, which served to protect the comfort of white parents and avoid more meaningful conversations and actions regarding racial inequity in the district. For instance, when the controversy erupted over then school board member Michael’s comments about the need for the district to support Muslim students and address problems of race-based bullying in the schools, the school leaders were silent- including at Riverside, which recently touted itself as school that was implementing programs to address bullying head on.

In our interview, Michael shared details from the complaints that a number of Muslim parents had brought to him regarding the bullying their children had experienced. He noted that a

prominent member of the Muslim community had told him that every Muslim child he knew in Parkwood who had experienced some form of harassment, and shared instances of students being told by their peers to “leave the country” being called “terrorists” and of female student being teased for wearing hijabs, and Michael noted that parents had shown him text messages and email evidence to corroborate what they reported.

However, white parents became enraged at Michael’s comments, arguing that racism did not exist in Parkwood and that his statements were overly politicized, and were simply lies that served only to create unnecessary tension and division in the community. A number of parents wrote letters to the other school board members requesting that they censure Michael and ask him to step down as a way of “unifying the community.” In response, the rest of the school board turned against him as well. Several members made public comments on social media to distance themselves from Michael, saying that his views did not represent their own. Four of the nine members even went so far as to write a letter to the editor in the local newspaper to condemn Michael’s statements, stating that they were “appalled” by some of his comments, and that “his allegations about our staff and students, some members of our community and his colleagues on the board are, to say the least, unfortunate.”

Throughout the debate around this incident, the purpose of Michael’s statements- to shed light on the reality that students in Parkwood schools were being bullied, and were suffering as a result, was largely obscured and ignored by district leaders. Instead, the white community and those who held positions of power in the district rallied together to create a unified force claiming that racism and race-based bullying in Parkwood was not actually a problem. Michael’s statements were dismissed, and more importantly, the needs of the student victims and their families were ignored and invalidated.

During this entire incident, not a single district or school level leader came out in support of Michael, or even to recognize that his points may have some validity that should be investigated. Michael, who had been subjected to a substantial amount of backlash and racism throughout his time in Parkwood, referred to the response of the community and district leaders as “subtle... you know, they questioned my patriotism and commitment to the school district, which, if you really think about it, is just another way to other-ize me, right?” Similarly, he shared that following this backlash, Muslim parents and students were fearful about bringing their concerns to other leaders in the district because “they feel as though if they speak out they will then become a target.”

This case was just one example of the ways in which institutional practices and narratives within the Parkwood community and district upheld the dominance of whites by emphasizing colorblindness and race neutrality. In this way, whites retained political power to control policies, practices, and the climate of the community as one in which race was not a topic to be discussed or addressed, which allowed the marginalization and suffering of children and parents of color to continue.

Conclusion: The Importance of Control in Preserving White Comfort

What I learned from my examination of institutional policies and practices in Parkwood, was that the largely white power structures at the school, district, and community levels were heavily informed and influenced by the interests and demands of white parents and residents. The voices and needs of whites in Parkwood were consistently more prominent, more powerful, and more valued than those of people of color in a way that led to both material and sociocultural marginalization of students of color. Through various mechanisms, district and school leaders implemented what I came to realize were forms of social control that were enacted in response to

whites' fears towards the increasing presence of students and families of color (Irwin et.al, 2013; Alexander, 2010; Horsford, 2019; Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011).

Some of these policies and practices, particularly the border patrol, were particularly extreme in the ways that they violated the privacy, rights, and wellbeing of parents and students of color in the district. I observed how control—of who was allowed in the schools, which school options were available, how students behaved, and how the community spoke about race and racism—was central to the preservation of whites' sense of security and satisfaction in their changing community.

In this way, white residents and parents were able to leverage their racial status to manage the extent to which their privilege and power was challenged amid racial demographic change in the community and the schools. The population change, I found, did not lead to a change in who held power and whose interests were served. In turn, the policies and practices that were in place in response to the wishes of white parents served to perpetuate inequity—in material resources between schools due to the transfer policy—and in treatment of students and their families who were criminalized, bullied, and regarded as though they did not belong in the community that many of them had moved to as a way of obtaining access to better educational opportunities.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Discussion

When I set out to begin work on this dissertation, I was broadly interested in studying racially diverse schools, in part because of my own experience attending desegregated schools in the South. I was interested in school integration as a mechanism for more equal distribution of educational resources and as a potential way of reducing racial bias through intergroup contact. At the same time, I was aware of the ways in which racial inequalities and white privilege often persist within racially diverse schools. Thus, I was interested in Parkwood as a case study because it was a changing community with diverse schools that did not exhibit many of the typical inequities that have persisted in diverse school settings. First, there were no real disparities in academic achievement across students of different backgrounds, and parents of color had higher levels of income and education than white parents. Moreover, some white parents at Riverside in particular remained in the school despite the fact that their children comprised a very small percentage of the overall racial makeup of the school.

As I was interested particularly in the meaning-making and privilege of white parents in racially diverse school contexts, I was intrigued by these white parents at Riverside who were going “against the grain” (the Stayers) compared to those in Parkwood who fled (the Leavers and Choosers). I was curious to examine what their supposed willingness to make school choice decisions that may potentially threaten their racial comfort and privilege might mean for broader efforts to interrupt patterns of white privilege and power in schools and society.

Looking back, I realize that a part of me was expecting, or at least wanting, to find a story of hope in Parkwood. I thought that perhaps the Riverside parents were unique in how they made sense of race and school status that might be informative for shifting broader patterns of meaning

making among white parents who often make school choice decisions that lead to racial segregation and inequality between schools. What I learned, however, was that white Riverside parents were not the racially progressive whites that I suppose I had hoped to find—and, in fact, their white privilege and power was very much maintained in this context even though they were technically in the racial “minority” based on actual enrollment numbers. And while students of color scored similarly to white students on standardized tests, I learned that there were many mechanisms that contributed to their marginalization and exclusion in ways beyond the “achievement gap”.

Thus, this study contributes to critical research on school desegregation and modern-day racially diverse schools that highlights the need to examine the material and sociocultural forms of inequity that are reproduced as a result of the centering and prioritizing of white interests. In this chapter, I discuss and reflect on the overarching themes that emerged from this dissertation, as well as the limitations of this study and implications for future research and practice.

The Iterative Relationship Between Racial Ideologies and Structures in Parkwood

Drawing on critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, and sociological theory on race and racism, this dissertation explored dynamics of whiteness and power in a previously all-white suburban school district that is now home to a very racially, ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse population. My first goal was to understand how white parents in this district made sense of and responded to demographic changes in their community, particularly in relation to the local public schools. Second, I aimed to understand the extent to which racial stratification, inequality and power asymmetries were maintained in this context.

Overall, the findings from this study contradict dominant colorblind narratives that argue that race no longer matters and should not be a consideration in the policies that govern our

society and our schools. Indeed, my findings point to the many ways in which whiteness operates, often in surreptitious ways, to maintain the racial status quo even in contexts, such as that in Parkwood, in which logic might imply that the power and privilege associated with whiteness would be threatened due to the declining proportion of whites in the community and similarities across whites and residents of color on measures of income, education levels, and academic outcomes. I found that despite the fact that they possessed lower levels of income and education than residents of color, whites derived specific status, privilege, and power as a result of their racial identity in the community and schools. At the same time, the schools (particularly Riverside) and the community lost status as a result of the increasing presence of people of color. These findings illustrate how the reputation and status functions of whiteness as property described by Cheryl Harris (1993) are associated with race regardless of other tangible measures often associated with assessments of reputation and status.

Tying the theme of race and status to theories of racial fear and racial threat (Bobo, 1988; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Jenson, 2005; Spanierman & Cabrera, 2014), I argue that whites in Parkwood were fearful of the increasing presence of people of color in their community and schools. These fears were expressed in a multitude of ways. Some were based on the common racist ideologies that associate people of color, and particularly blacks, with assessments of inferiority, moral deficiency, or criminality (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Mills, 1997; Crenshaw, 1988), which motivated whites (particularly the Leavers and Choosers) to want to distance themselves by moving to another community or using the transfer policy to avoid having their children attend Riverside in particular. Others exhibited fears of losing the comfort, privilege, and status that came from being the dominant racial group in society and, therefore, having their culture, values, and interests reflected as the *norm* (Crenshaw, 1988; Harris, 1993; DiAngelo, 2018;

Carter, 2012; Jenson, 2005). And some whites feared having conversations about racial inequality and racism that might identify them as beneficiaries of unearned white privilege and power (Jenson, 2005).

These racial fears were intertwined with how whites in Parkwood talked about the status and reputation of their community and schools. Indeed, the decline in white residents and the perceived loss of *whiteness as the norm* in the culture of the community was associated in the minds of some whites in my study with a decline in *status* in the community and schools. In other words, I theorize that whites' fears of losing their own privilege and comfort was tied to their negative assessments of the status of the people of color who had moved into Parkwood. In turn, whites responded to their racial threats and fears in this previously all-white community by making efforts to reassert their power in other ways.

The common perceptions of students and families of color as morally or culturally deficient, or even criminal in the case of the border patrol policy, were used to justify the forms of social control that served to reify systems of racial stratification and white supremacy in Parkwood. This justification for social control through the use of moral and cultural racist ideologies mirror similar trends used to subjugated people of color in different ways throughout history (Irwin, Davidson & Hall-Sanchez, 2013; Crenshaw, 1988). Indeed, as Irwin et.al. (2013) argue, "In the effort to achieve racial control, individuals of color, especially African Americans, have historically been constructed in negative ways, often as shiftless, uneducable, dangerous, criminal, and in need of strict control, exclusion, and/or confinement." (p.23) This was evidenced, for instance, through the false rumors that circulated throughout Parkwood about increasing crime in the community and in Riverside as demographics changed.

The Stayers, who in some ways defied the norm in Parkwood because they did not subscribe to the same negative perceptions of Riverside that the Choosers and Leavers held, still internalized understandings about whiteness as tied to status. This was explicated in how these white Riverside parents attributed the reputation and quality of the school to the white leaders and teachers who worked there. What's more, these white parents often made references to the strength of the Riverside administration, and particularly the principal, Mr. Gallo, as disciplinarian who helped to prevent the school from becoming unruly. In this way, I argue that these white parents stayed in this school in part because the predominantly white staff made them feel as though the threats that might be associated with a predominantly black and Latinx school were mitigated by discipline and control. Moreover, the white parents maintained their power and control through their influence on the culture of the school and the continued centering of their interests despite the fact that they comprised a relatively small proportion of the parent population.

Importantly, the racial ideologies that were held by whites in Parkwood served to legitimate actions of white parents and also informed district and school policies and practice that led to racial segregation, stratification, and the marginalization of students and parents of color. Indeed, associations between the racial makeup of the different secondary schools in Parkwood led many white parents (the Leavers and Choosers) to flee the district or the school, resulting in a loss of enrollment in Riverside. The declining enrollment led to a loss of funds for the school, which eventually required them to eliminate classes, extracurricular offerings, and staff positions. In this way, even though Riverside was equally high achieving to the other schools in Parkwood, the loss of resources because of the perceptions and, in turn, actions of white parents in response to demographic change, led to declining financial investment in the

school. As a result, students at Riverside were disadvantaged when compared to students in the other schools, particularly Easthaven, which were able to offer more academic and extracurricular opportunities to their students. Indeed, this is an example of the *self-fulfilling prophecy of segregation* explained by Wells et.al. (2014), in which the reputational decline of a school that results from demographic change precedes actual decline in resources and so-called “quality”, but eventually becomes reality.

The Parkwood district’s border patrol was perhaps the starkest example of how perceptions and fears of whites in the community were institutionalized into racist policy. The school district went to great lengths to investigate students who were reported by (mostly white) residents or school staff when they were suspected to not live within the school district boundaries. My interviews highlighted the extreme measures that the district took to surveil and investigate hundreds of students over the years—invading their privacy, making them feel as though they were unwelcome, and instilling what I assume must have been a great deal of fear into them and their families—based on the perceptions of whites that they must not belong in the district because they were not white. Surveillance was practiced not only by those who worked for the residency office, but by community members, as well as school counselors and teachers, who were presumably the closest and most trusted adults who interacted with students within the school buildings. The policing of Parkwood’s boundaries was likewise enforced through policies from the district to classroom and even curricular level. In this way, people of color in Parkwood were surrounded by a collective, multi-layered system of white suspicion and control.

The process of dehumanizing families and children of color through residency investigations based on the expressions of resentment of white residents who felt that they did not belong, was a clear example of how white power structures embodied racist ideologies and in

turn, served to uphold and maintain white supremacy and the marginalization of people of color in this community despite the fact that whites did not comprise a numerical majority or have more socioeconomic power. This illustrates how the right to exclude, as a function of whiteness as property, operated in Parkwood through the enforcing and policing of district boundaries in response to demographic change.

Similarly, I highlight the extent to which students of color were subjected to policing and control through school disciplinary practices. I learned that Riverside in particular, because of its predominantly black and Latinx student body, was viewed by whites in the community as inferior and dangerous in comparison to the other schools. Thus, in an effort to improve its reputation, Mr. Gallo and other school leaders were under immense pressure to maintain an image of “order” in the school by restricting students’ freedom and controlling their adolescent behaviors. In this way, I argue that the racist perceptions among whites that Riverside was unsafe and unruly contributed to what at least some black parents viewed to be unfair and biased disciplinary practices in the school. While more research would be needed in order to understand the details of how and to what extent students in Riverside were disciplined unfairly, suspension data indicate that black students are nearly five times more likely than white students to receive out of school suspensions.

Despite the clear evidence from my research that racism was very much present in the ideologies and institutions in Parkwood and its schools, I found that white residents and district leaders strictly upheld narratives of colorblindness that both obscured the reality and led to the avoidance of directly addressing the concerns expressed by students and parents of color. Arguments by parents of color that advocated for the district to make efforts to increase teacher diversity, for instance, were swiftly and strongly resisted by white parents through claims that

such efforts would be discriminatory and racist against whites (who comprised about 90% of the teaching force in the secondary schools). Even when specific incidents of racism and bullying of Muslim students were reported, white parents and school board members alike denied the claims and conflated them with overly-political and disloyal to the schools. As a result, Muslim parents and students were intimidated into silence and the harassment that the students experienced went unaddressed. Colorblindness, in this way, was more than a way of making meaning among whites in Parkwood. It was essentially a tool—a justification to avoid efforts to address racism and racial inequality and to maintain an image of race-neutrality that served to uphold white supremacy in the community and the schools.

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to examine how white parents in Parkwood made sense of racial demographic change in the local public schools, and the extent to and mechanisms by which white power and privilege were maintained in this context. Thus, white parents were the participants of focus in my data collection efforts. My interviews with and observations of white parents gave me insight into how their emotions, ideologies, and actions were informed by the broader context of their changing community, which provided a rich understanding of the ways in which their meaning making was embedded in and reflective of broad structures of racism in society. One limitation of this study was that I had limited access to white parents who used the transfer policy to attend Easthaven or Westview. I made many efforts to reach these parents, but was repeatedly denied. I believe that these parents were defensive about their use of the policy and did not want to be identified as transfer parents, particularly when the district began to consider potential changes to the policy.

Moreover, while my focus was on white parents, I believe that my findings would have been richer with additional data from parents of color—particularly those who could speak directly to the ongoing inequities in the district. Most of the parents of color that I interviewed said that their experiences were mostly positive in the schools—while some of my interview data and much of my observation data established that this was not the case for all. One potential reason for this discrepancy could be that parents of color may not have felt comfortable discussing their experiences with racism in the community with me, given that I am a white researcher, particularly given the community culture in which narratives of colorblindness are strictly upheld. More research with parents of color, particularly Muslim parents and parents whose children had been the targets of strict disciplinary practices in Riverside, would deepen our understanding of how parents and children of color were affected by the institutional policies and practices that largely centered the interests of white parents and residents.

Implications for Research

This research adds to the critical scholarship on school desegregation that argues that racism and white supremacy persist in racially diverse schools (Walker, 1996; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Horsford, 2019; Wells et.al, 2004; Dumas, 2014). In studies of desegregation and diverse schools, I argue that this reality must be more central to the common understandings of researchers who study these schools. Researching and developing implications for education policy around school desegregation cannot be complete without a clear attention to the well documented ways that inequity is reproduced—in explicit and implicit ways—within diverse schools. This work must consistently center the voices of parents and students of color in this research that have too often been overlooked (Horsford, 2019).

Moreover, my findings illustrate the importance of exploring the iterative relationship between racial ideologies of whites—which are related to fears of losing privilege, perceptions of status and morality as tied to whiteness—and institutional policies and practices that create, uphold, and maintain advantages for whites and disadvantages—both material and psychological—for people of color. The multi-modal qualitative design that I employed allowed me to examine the individual-level meaning-making of parents, residents, and school leaders in Parkwood and collective white ideologies and actions as they related to and reinforced institutional policies and practices. Without each of the forms of data that I collected- interviews, in-person and online observations, the full picture of how racism was reproduced in ideological and materials ways would have been incomplete. Thus, as colorblind ideologies in the “post-racial” era serve to obscure the reality of racial inequality that persists, it is essential that researchers interrogate the complex and interconnected ways that racism is embedded, enacted, and reproduced in the every-day ways that individuals think, feel, and behave, as well as in the structures that constitute our broader ways of governing and knowing—our policies, practices, dominant ideologies, and sources of knowledge.

Implications for Policy and Practice.

The concerns related to broad structures and ideologies of racism presented in this study are vast, and the policies needed to address them in any meaningful way are much too broad and extensive for me to theorize in this section. Thus, I focus my policy recommendations specifically on demographically changing suburban school contexts. What my research found was that this suburban community that was previously all-white was still very much controlled by white power structures and white residents in ways that significantly disadvantaged residents and students of color in spite of and beyond common measures of economic and academic

success. In light of this, leaders in demographically changing communities, who should be reflective of the racial makeup of the residents who live there, must be cognizant of the necessity of racial representation and inclusion in the political process. There must be targeted and specific efforts to hear, understand, and respond to the concerns of people of color in these communities in ways that are safe and welcoming.

Schools in these communities should also make specific efforts to acknowledge and address the need to decenter whiteness in the school culture and governance. Efforts must be made to hire teachers who reflect the racial and cultural backgrounds of the students in the schools. Curriculum must be inclusive, relevant, and anti-racist. White teachers and leaders should be required to attend ongoing training on racial literacy and culturally responsive practices to help them to serve the needs of their students to the best of their abilities. And leaders must curb the efforts of white parents to reassert their power and privilege in ways that would marginalize students of color and deny them educational opportunities. This work must be intentional—if the realities of racism and white supremacy that permeate society are not understood, acknowledged, and dismantled by those who lead and teach in racially diverse public schools, they will never achieve the potential benefits of school integration.

Conclusion: Lessons from Parkwood

This dissertation began with a reference to the previously all-white suburban community of Ferguson, Missouri, where Michael Brown, at the age of eighteen, was murdered by police officer Darren Wilson, who had been known to make racist remarks while working with the Ferguson police force. The police department in Ferguson was known for unfairly targeting and profiling African American residents and had an already strained relationship with the black

community. Ferguson has been portrayed in the media as a community that has fallen from prosperity to poverty; from idyllic suburbia to suburban wasteland.

While Parkwood looks very different from Ferguson on the outside—most notably because it is still a solidly middle-class community with a strong economic base, the structures of racism that contributed to the marginalization of blacks in Ferguson were present in Parkwood as well. Both Ferguson and Parkwood, like countless other changing suburbs, saw massive patterns of white flight and decline in the perceived status and quality of the community and schools in response to demographic change. And in both communities, despite the fact that they no longer physically excluded people of color from living and going to school there, whites continued to maintain the bulk of power and privilege in ways that excluded black, Latinx and Asian families in political, social, and cultural ways. Moreover, in both communities, whites exerted immense control through the policing and surveillance of communities of color in dehumanizing ways that threatened their physical and psychological well-being.

Like the middle-class black families who moved to Ferguson in the 1980s and 1990s, the families of color who made Parkwood their home came in search of what they hoped would be a better life. They saw the suburbs as their entry into an idyllic, safe community with good schools and good people. However, my research in Parkwood left me with the understanding that the “suburban dream” may still be exclusive to whites in the current context, even in the absence of housing laws that directly bar people of color from access.

Indeed, the story of Parkwood is not a hopeful one. Instead, the lessons from Parkwood show that in a society and country that often claims to be “post-racial,” the battle against racism—in both structural and ideological forms—is far from over. As our country, and suburban communities in particular, are growing more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse

every day, we must recognize, name, and actively combat the overt and more subtle, or accepted, ways in which white supremacy is maintained and reproduced across contexts. It is only through a direct acknowledgement and dismantling of racism in its ideological and institutional forms that we may ever hope to move towards a more just future.

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Appendix A: Parent Interview Protocol

Consent and Audiotaping:

Please take a moment to review the consent form. Do you have any questions before signing?

Would you mind if I audiotape this conversation? Recording it will help me to have a complete record of our conversation. You may request at any time to discontinue or temporarily stop the recording.

Is audio recording acceptable?
(If yes, begin recording).

Interview Questions:

How long have you lived in this community?

Where did you live before?

Where did you grow up, what kinds of schools did you go to?
(Probe on public/private, racially diverse, etc.)

Why did you choose to move here/ stay here? What were the major reasons that you chose this community?

Has this community changed in any ways while you have lived here? How so?

How would you describe this community to someone who is not from here?

What role did the school district or schools play in your decision to move or stay in this community?

What information did you have about the schools in this district before you chose to live in this community? Did you speak with anyone about the schools?

What were you looking for in a school district?
What were the most important school characteristics to you when making your choice?

What, if anything, did you hear/ have you heard about the reputation of the different schools?
Why do you think the schools have these reputations? Do you agree with them?

Why did you decide to/ are you considering sending your children to [school]?

What were the main factors that influenced your choice?

Did you/ have you visited the school as part of the decision-making process?

Did you consider/ are you considering using the transfer policy to transfer to one of the other schools? Why or why not?

Was the decision process difficult for any reason?

Did the relative reputations of the schools influence your decision in any way?

Why do you think that some parents choose to use the transfer policy?

Probe on demographics and what about demographics make some people want to leave?

Can you characterize those parents who transfer in any way?

Do you think that there are any key differences between the parents who transfer and those who stay?

Probe on values and beliefs.

Did the diversity of [school] influence your decision to choose / your consideration of this school in any way? Why or why not?

Do you think that school diversity is important? Why or why not?

Are there any specific benefits of attending a diverse school for your child? Any drawbacks?

Probe on future jobs/ careers/ multicultural capital issues.

(White Parents- Riverside) Did you have any worries about the fact that your child is attending/ may attend a school in which he/she is a racial/ethnic minority? Why or why not?

Why do you think that some parents choose not to send their children to a school in which their child is a racial/ethnic minority?

Would you choose to send your child to a predominantly white school if you could?

Do you worry about the reputation of the school influencing your child's education or opportunities in any way?

Would you choose to send their kids to a school with higher test scores if you could?

Would you ever consider sending your child to another racially diverse schools with test scores that are lower than [school's]? Why or Why not?

Do you think that [school] is different in any way from the predominantly non-white schools in the nearby city or in other districts nearby? How so?

How would you describe your child's experience at [school]?

Are you happy with the decision that you made to send your child to [school]?

How would you describe the school to someone who does not send their children to [school]?

What do you think are the best things about [school]?

Anything you would change about [school]?

How would you describe the relationship between teachers, administrators and parents?

Do you feel welcome at [school]? Do your children feel welcome? Why or why not?

Do you think that the school incorporates the different cultural backgrounds of the students in the classrooms or school events?

Have you noticed any tensions in the community or the school as diversity has increased?
Between parents or between students? Can you give an example?

With recent events related to race relations in the U.S., has that impacted dynamics at the school in any way?

Do you think that racial inequality is a problem in this country? Why or why not?

Appendix B: School Board Interview Protocol

Consent and Audiotaping:

Please take a moment to review the consent form. Do you have any questions before signing?

Would you mind if I audiotape this conversation? Recording it will help me to have a complete record of our conversation. You may request at any time to discontinue or temporarily stop the recording.

Is audio recording acceptable?
(If yes, begin recording).

Interview Questions

How long have you lived in this community?

Where did you live before moving here?

Why did you move to this community?

What role did the school district or schools play in your decision to move or stay in this community?

What did you know about the schools? What were you looking for in schools?

How does this community compare to where you grew up? How do the schools compare to the schools you went to?

How many children do you have/ where do they go to school? Why did you choose that/those schools (if applicable)?

Has this community changed in any ways while you have lived here? How so? Are there any benefits or consequences that have come from those changes?

How would you describe this community to someone who is not from here?

How would you describe the reputation of the school district? How would you describe the reputation of the individual schools?

How would you describe the differences across the three middle/high schools?

How do you think changing demographics have influenced the school? Positive? Negative?

How long have you been on the school board?

Why did you decide to run?

What do you think are the most important parts of your job as school board member?

What are some of the biggest challenges?

What are some of the most common issues that parents bring to the board?

Can you describe the level of parent interaction that you have as a board member? Are certain parents more vocal or involved than others?

I have heard about the transfer policy- what is your opinion on it?

Why do you think that some parents choose to use the transfer policy?

Probe on demographics and what about demographics make some people want to leave?

Can you characterize those parents who transfer out in any way?

Do you think that there are any key differences between the parents who transfer and those who stay?

Probe on values and beliefs.

Why do you think that the board has supported the transfer policy?

Can you tell me about the residency office? What is their purpose?

Do you think that school diversity is important? Why or why not?

Do you think that racial inequality is a problem in this country? Why or why not?

Do you think racial tensions are a problem in the community?

What are your goals for being on the school board? Will you run again next term?

Appendix C: Administrator Interview Protocol

Consent and Audiotaping:

Please take a moment to review the consent form. Do you have any questions before signing?

Would you mind if I audiotape this conversation? Recording it will help me to have a complete record of our conversation. You may request at any time to discontinue or temporarily stop the recording.

Is audio recording acceptable?
(If yes, begin recording).

Interview Questions:

How long have you been in the district? How did you end up here? Why?

How does this district/school compare to others you worked in – what strikes you as the most important differences?

For those who have lived or worked there a long time – what changes have occurred? How do people talk about the changes? Probe on challenges/tension and benefits of diversity.

Why do you think the change has happened?

How would you describe this community to someone who is not from here?

How would you describe the reputation of the school district? How would you describe the reputation of the individual schools?

How would you describe the differences across the three middle/high schools?

How would you describe the relationships between parents and teachers/ administration in the school/district? Have demographic changes affected this?

How do you think the demographic changes have affected the curriculum planning, staff development, faculty meetings/discussions?

To what degree do the demographics of the district play into discussions of curriculum and pedagogy?

How would you describe the discipline policies in the school/district? How would you describe the level of disciplinary issues in the school/district?

Do you think students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds have a similar sense of belonging in this school?

To what extent do you think the parents of this school embrace or resist the demographic changes?

What do you think are the most important parts of your job?

What are some of the biggest challenges?

What are some of the most common issues that parents bring to your team?

I have heard about the transfer policy- what is your opinion on it?

Why do you think that some parents choose to use the transfer policy?

Probe on demographics and what about demographics make some people want to leave?

Can you characterize those parents who transfer out in any way?

Do you think that there are any key differences between the parents who transfer and those who stay?

Probe on values and beliefs.

Why do you think that the district has supported the transfer policy?

Can you tell me about the residency office? What is their purpose?

Do you think that school diversity is important? Why or why not?

Do you think that racial inequality is a problem in this country? Why or why not?

Do you think racial tensions are a problem in the community? Why or why not?